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THE LONDON READER

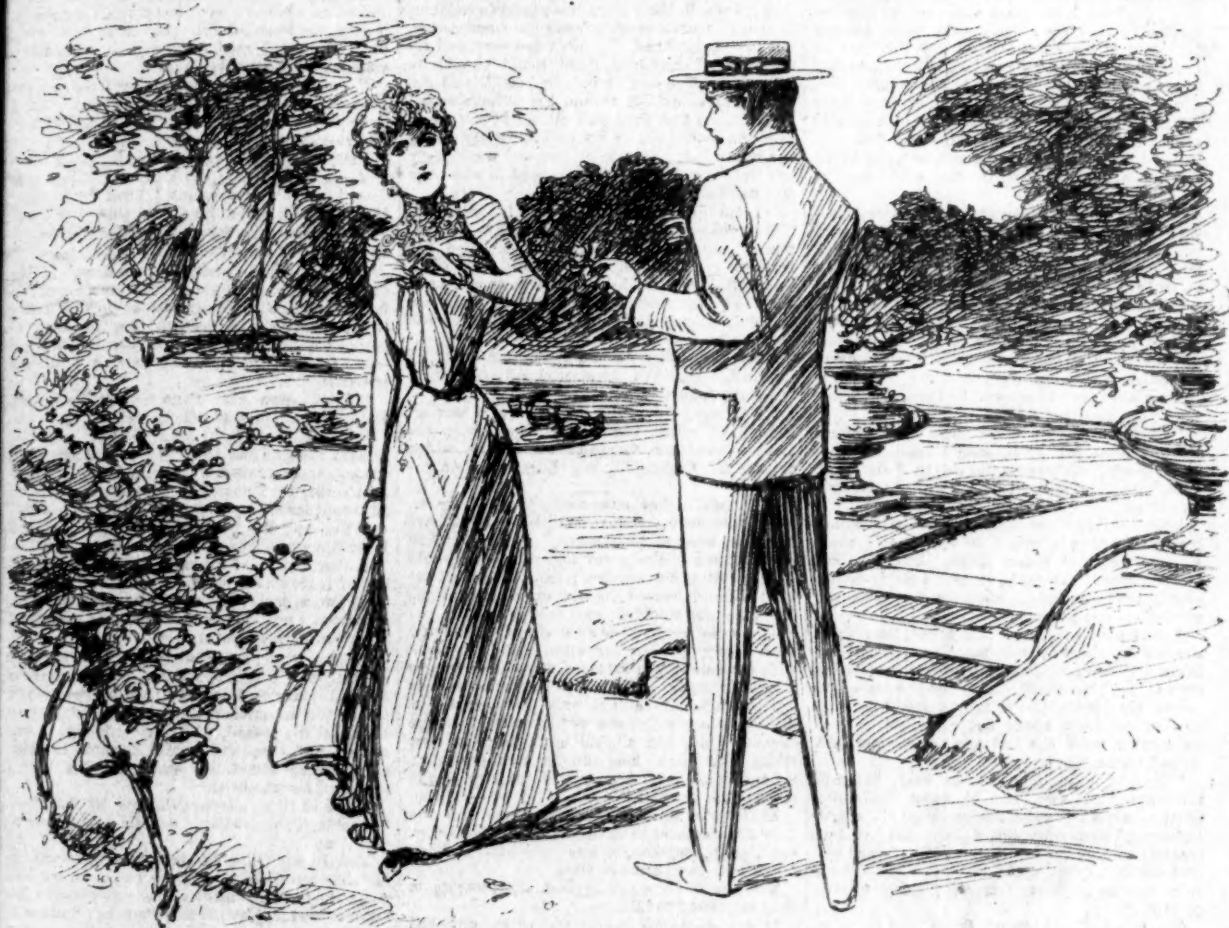
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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"DO YOU WISH ME TO GO, LILLIAN?" HE SAID, GENTLY.

GIPSY'S MISTAKE.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

THE last ray of the evening sun had gilded the West with its glory, as he sank to rest beneath a bank of grey clouds, turning them into crimson and gold; whilst Thorpe Grange and its white walls, over which the roses loved to twine, became dark and gloomy, left there with its windows open to receive no more than the last note of some bird later than its fellows, or the whisper of the whispering leaves.

Even the two girls, who had but a few moments before occupied a seat so that they could witness this departing glory, arose as the golden edges disappeared in the deep sombre shade now pervading all, the while a shiver passed through their frames.

The one was tall, willowy, and slender in form; she could not have been more than twenty, but her quiet gentle ways might have failed to endow her with the youth which her sister, but two years her junior, so fully expressed at the same time, that the style of beauty of each was in such total variance that they were, on most occasions, distinguished as the dark or the fair Miss Glendelling.

Lillian, the elder, christened Lilly by friends and relatives, was of that delicate class of loveliness which her name signified, the whiteness of her complexion relieved but by the rose-tint which suffused her cheeks, deepening, as it would, on the least emotion, beneath the alabaster skin. Her eyes were blue, like the heaven above; the while her hair was of that tawny colour which in the sunshine would turn to dead gold.

Maudie, the younger, was a bright, merry nymph in whose dark eyes there ever lurked a ray of mischief. Her complexion was of a creamy hue, on which a colour, bright as a damask rose,

rested; and her hair, in direct contrast to her sister's, was black as night.

She was her father's pet—his Gipsy he named her—and as Gipsy she was always known and recognised.

Mr. Glendelling considered there was no girl in the neighbourhood for miles round who could compete with his darling—an opinion he did not hesitate to impress upon the young beauty—who would, on studying her features whenever the opportunity presented itself, come to the conclusion that on that point she fully agreed with him.

Yes; Lillian was a sweet, pretty girl the world around Thorpe would admit, but she could not come near the other sister—the beautiful brunette, as they would flatteringly style her—and until she had flown the parental nest they feared the insipid beauty of the other would fail to prove an attraction to the young men who fluttered around the home of the banker.

But in this they were wrong; for before the Gipsy had left the French college, in which she

had completed her education abroad, Lillian had become betrothed to the Hon. Sydney Mount Aven—the Mount Aven estate being not far distant from their own lovely home.

The old lord had taken a great fancy to Mr. Glendelling, for he had proved himself a true friend to the nobleman on many occasions, advancing him large sums of money at different times to meet the debts which he was so frequently called on to pay for the extravagances of his eldest and favourite son, and showing him such true friendship and consideration in the great grief which overcame him when he received tidings of that son's death that when Sydney told him of his intentions towards the Lily he expressed not only his consent, but the pleasure it gave him to receive her into their family.

Lady Mount Aven opened her arms towards her also, and Lillian felt a happiness even greater than the affection she experienced for her lover in the thought that the mother's love, for which she had longed but never known, would now be realised.

And thus matters were when Gipsy returned with French ways and a French tongue, with which she lapsed English in a pretty, fascinating way, bringing all around her under the magnetism of her charm.

"And so you will one day be 'My Lady'!" she was saying to her sister, who, with girlish delight, had been telling her of her engagement, and the pleasure she would have in introducing her to her future brother-in-law.

They had vacated their seat by the open window then; for, as Gipsy said,—

"In England one scarcely knew what summer was till it was just going away;" and, although fine, the wind made one quite shiver. "But then, dear," she added with a laugh, "I am not in love, you know."

Lillian looked up and smiled, wondering within herself how long it would be ere Cupid's shaft would enter that young heart. And then she moved towards the table, to open a richly-bound album that she might show to her sister the portrait of her lover.

"Is he not handsome!" she asked, turning to the leaf on which he was portrayed; but Gipsy made little comment, only staring with wide-open eyes at the photograph, the while the colour on her cheeks deepened to crimson; and then murmuring something about not being able to give an opinion until she had seen the original, she turned to the piano.

"Do play something, Lillian, dear, between the lights," she said, turning down the lamp, until merely a soft red shade pervaded the apartment; and then resuming the seat she had but recently vacated by the window, she looked out into the still, quiet night, the while her sister's voice was the only sound breaking softly on her reverie.

For Gipsy, lively, merry Gipsy, had in these few moments become very quiet, and a suspicious moisture had gathered beneath the dark fringes of her velvety eyes, until, in a large splash, a heavy tear fell followed by another and yet another, when the door being opened, she hastily recovered herself, all traces they had left behind being brushed away as Mr. Glendelling entered the room.

"All in the dark, children?" he said, moving to turn up the lamps; but Gipsy hastily rose.

"Don't do that, papa, dear," she said, leading him to where she was seated. "It is so nice here!" and then bidding him occupy the seat lately Lillian's, she moved near to his side, her head with its wealth of raven-black hair resting on his shoulder.

She was so silent; so unlike his Gipsy, that the banker grew anxious, for he could feel her heart, like a fluttering bird, beating against his own, and the little hand he held was hot and burning.

"Are you not well, my darling?" he asked; but she looked with a faint smile into his face, assuring him there was nothing the matter with her; and so he had to be satisfied. But it was not long before he assured her if she would not catch cold he should, if they sat much longer by the open window.

She arose then, following him into the room

where Lillian, having finished her song, was seated by the centre table.

For a moment she made an effort to recover her usual spirits, but it was only for a time; and then there came again into her dark eyes that far-away look she was unable to control, while a perceptible shiver passed through her frame.

"There, Gipsy, I told you how it would be!" Mr. Glendelling said, on whom her strange mood was not lost. She looked up, then,—

"I think I have taken a chill," she said; "I forgot I was in the treacherous clime of perfidious Albion!" a smile breaking over her countenance, but it soon vanished. "I don't feel very well to-night, dear," she added, "and would be glad to go to bed. You don't mind, do you?" and she put her arms lovingly around her father's neck.

She kissed him then, but of Lillian sitting so near she took little or no notice, merely telling her not to hurry because of her, and would have left the room, had she not advanced to where she was standing.

"I am quite sure you are ill!" she said. "Why did you not say so before, dear? I am so sorry," and she would have accompanied her from the room, but Gipsy would not hear of it, even shrinking from her when she approached; and then, as a servant answered her summons, she only stayed for a moment to receive the banker's caress, and she was gone.

"I had no idea the child was not well," he said to Lillian, when the door closed behind her.

"Has she been over-worrying herself?" "No, papa," was the reply. "She was all right until within the last half-hour, when her manner suddenly changed!" a change which neither Mr. Glendelling nor Lily could understand.

But once in her own room, Gipsy soon dismissed her maid. "She could not bear to have her hair brushed that night," she said. And now that she had removed her dress she would dispense with her services; but she was to have Miss Lillian informed she was on no account to hasten, as she would be soon asleep.

But no sooner had the door closed behind her than Gipsy was on her knees beside a trunk which remained the same as when she came to Thorpe Grange. It had never been unpacked by her orders, as she said it only contained a few useless articles which she would rather arrange herself. She had slipped on a peignoir, over which her black hair fell in rich profusion, enhancing her great beauty, and the rich colour mounted to her face.

Lifting the lid she recklessly tossed on the floor a few articles of dress to which she paid no heed, until, beneath, a small cabinet of ebony inlaid with pearl came in view.

This she lifted carefully, and then, tossing in the rest, closed the lid.

It was a beautiful toy; and as she unlocked the tiny doors which closed in the centre, there were displayed a nest of drawers of exquisite workmanship.

The one she first opened was filled with cards for different seasons, which had been presented to her by schoolgirl friends in the French pension; but further than a cursory glance over its contents, Gipsy stayed no longer to examine them, closing it with a force which threatened to upset the delicate fabric, not until she had opened and shut each arriving at the one which contained that of which she was in search.

It was a bundle of letters, perfumed with the cedar which had enclosed them, and tied with a blue ribbon, which had become faded, notwithstanding the care with which they had been treasured.

For some moments she remained, her eyes, wet with unshed tears, fixed on the little packet, as though it was too sacred to be untied; but as a large drop fell on the beloved bundle, it recalled her to herself.

For a second she listened, fearing that an unsympathising spirit should discover her in an occupation which, if mingled with pain, at least gave her, for the time being, unutterable happiness.

"They could not all be false," she said, as one after the other she read and re-read the passages

of love those letters contained; and then refolding them she pressed them to her lips, one alone remaining, which she had not as yet opened.

But a step without caused her to start, and, rising hastily, she tossed the articles back, only retaining the cabinet, with which in her hand she moved towards the toilet-table, as Lillian entered the room.

"Not in bed, Gipsy!" she exclaimed, regarding the childish figure before her.

"No; I could not sleep," was the reply, "and so I thought I would look over these old letters to find an address I have lost; but I suppose it is gone, for I can't see it. But it is quite early yet," she added, raising her eyes to a simple clock standing on the mantelpiece.

"Yes, dear, it is early, not yet eleven; but papa was so fitly, fearing you were ill, that I came myself to see how matters stood, and to relieve his anxiety."

"Oh! I am tired, that is all, Lily. What a dear old worry it is," she laughed. "Tell him, dear, I had a headache, but I shall be all right in the morning, and give him this, and this," when, advancing to where her sister still stood, she kissed her on either cheek.

"There, just see what you have done," Lillian said, whilst recovering from the unexpected embrace which Gipsy bestowed on her, and she would have stayed to assist her to gather together the treasures which, in her impulse, had fallen from the cabinet she held, had not she prevented her.

"I will soon pick them all up," she said. Don't stay a moment. Good-night!"

"Not good-night, Gipsy," Lillian returned, moving towards the door, "for I shall come and see you again; but don't sit up later, dear, and let me ring for Annette." And she would have advanced for that purpose, but Gipsy objected.

"No, no; she has unfurnished my hair, and I could not bear her worrying about me now."

A short while after, and she was asleep, the deep fringes of her eyelids resting on her cheek. They were moist as with the evening dew; otherwise a peaceful calm, like that of an infant, remained on each feature.

Lillian, true to her word, came to bid her good-night. The moonbeams had entered in 'twixt the unclosed curtains; and as she stooped to kiss the unconscious sleeper she thought how beautiful she looked, with their soft rays falling on her, and then she turned towards her own room, when something white on the carpet attracted her attention.

"One of Gipsy's letters she has let fall from her cabinet," she soliloquised, and she moved to pick it up.

Yes, it was Gipsy's; there was her name on it. She could see it plainly, for the moon had come out so bright now as if she would show her what it was, and by the tiny light left burning it would have passed her notice; when, as she lifted it from the floor, for a moment she remained like one transfixed, and then, the while a cloud obscured the moon, the sudden pain which passed over her features was hidden.

She placed it in her bosom then, where it seemed to burn and eat into her flesh, while a great agony came into her soft, blue eyes. She moved once again towards the bed where Gipsy still slept, for one moment a feeling of anger entering her breast; the next it was gone, and she was on her knees by her side, weeping out in bitter sob the pain she could not control.

She knew not how long she had remained thus, her head buried in the coverlet to stifle the grief she could ill suppress, when a hand was passed over her head. It was Gipsy's.

"Is it you, Lily?" she asked. "How you frightened me. Have you been long kneeling there?"

"Not long, dear," she answered. "I have been watching you whilst you slept, but I must go now; it is so late."

She arose then; all anger had left her breast as she pressed Gipsy to her bosom, forgetting all in that moment but her great love for her—her only sister; and then she moved from the room, with that dreadful doubt wearing into her soul.

CHAPTER II.

THE morning broke fresh and fair around Thorpe, the sun escaping with glad rays from behind the grey clouds of the early dawn, and the birds joined in a merry chorus as they sang amid the green-leaved boughs of the trees which surrounded the Grange itself.

In the distance beyond the brown and yellow of far-off fields could be seen the waters of the Yare sparkling and shimmering with the broad light on its surface, and further still, rearing above the mighty oaks and straight-boughed poplars, was the lofty spire of the cathedral in the adjacent city, between which and the country surrounding Thorpe little woods stood here and there, shutting out the noise and bustle which might otherwise have reached this sequestered spot.

But so secluded was all around that one might have thought themselves hundreds of miles from the town where the big chimneys belched forth their volumes of smoke high above the green of the trees, until as dark black clouds they rolled to mix with the fleecy ones on the blue above, which alone told the dwellers in their pretty suburban homes of the industries carried on so near.

Mr. Glendell was the first to rise; and when Lillian and Gipsy made their appearance, he met them with a large bunch of fresh roses, still wet with the morning dew, which he had already gathered.

"There, girls, do as you like with them," he said, laying them on the snow-white damask amid the dainty breakfast china, the while he gave and received the customary kiss.

"And how is my darling this morning?" he asked, looking fondly into Gipsy's face, as Lillian was already engaged arranging her treasures. "Is she better?"

"I am quite well, papa," she answered, "and so cold, as you prophesied. I was only tired," and then she picked up a crimson rose, which, after having inhaled its perfume, she fastened close to her round, full throat.

"Are they not lovely?" she said, returning to those which her sister had arranged, when a shadow fell across the window, and she moved quickly round.

"Guthbert!" she exclaimed, beneath her breath, and would have advanced holding out her hand to the newcomer, when something in his manner restrained her, and left her standing where she was, a colour deep as the flowers she wore mounting to her temples.

"Come in, Sydney, my boy!" Mr. Glendell was saying to the visitor, who had already crossed the threshold of the French window; and then he rang the bell, giving directions for another cover to be laid.

And still Gipsy remained with a half-dazed look, watching him as he advanced to where Lillian was pouring out coffee from a silver urn, watching him as he whispered a something in her ear which made the love-light leap to her blue eyes; and then for the first time he appeared to notice that she was in the room.

He looked to where she was standing, and Lillian remembered then it was the first time they had seen each other.

"How stupid," she said, "but papa and I forget you had never seen Gipsy before—my little sister whom I have so often named. I hope you will be great friends. Gipsy, the Hon. Sydney Mount Aven."

"Rather a ceremonious introduction for brother and sister, is it not, Gipsy?" he laughed, holding out his hand to the girl, whilst Lillian returned to her duties.

But Gipsy made no reply; she merely held out hers in a mechanical kind of way, and he thought how cold it was as he released it. Then she seated herself by the table, when the conversation became general; but with the exception of the two men who carried it on its animation soon passed.

Lillian had not been unconscious of the effect Sydney's appearance had had on her sister; and then there occurred to her the events of the last evening, and notwithstanding that after the first shock she had regarded the discovery she

had made in a different light, it now came back to her in all its hideous meaning, and the sense of a deep wrong entered into her mind.

"What is it you propose doing, Sydney?" Mr. Glendell asked. "Are you going to ride with the girls, or are you all going to lose away this glorious day amidst the flowers and the birds?"

"As far as I am concerned," Sydney answered, "I can do no more than deliver my mother's message, which is that she would be delighted if Lillian and her sister would spend the day at Mount Aven. For myself I have promised to be one of a fishing party, comprised of some officers from the barracks, although I would far rather stay away," he added, with a rueful countenance, and looking at Lillian.

But she had turned away, and, asking Gipsy to accompany her, would have stepped out to the grass, which, like velvet, green and soft, lay before the open window; but she had letters to write, she said, and she was certain they could dispense with her society, and before either could remonstrate she was gone.

The banker had adjourned to his study, so that they could avoid each other no longer; and notwithstanding Lillian's anxiety that he would be late for the fishing excursion, Sydney determined on their taking a stroll in the glad sunshine, amid the sweet-scented roses.

"When did your sister return from the Continent?" he asked, the while he plucked one from its stem to give to her.

"Only two days since," she replied, and when he would have fastened the flower in her dress she moved from him. "Don't do that," she said, "I—I don't like it placed there."

He looked down on her then, a strange, sad light coming into his hazel eyes.

"Why not, Lillian?" he asked. "You never refused me before."

"It was different then," she replied, almost angrily. "But see how late it is!" she added, referring to her watch. "I shall be sorry to keep you from your friend."

He remained for a moment thinking, hoping she would give some reason for her altered bearing towards him, that she would urge some fancied wrong, that he might refute it, and take her in his arms and tell her how he loved her.

But she made no sign, only standing there cold as a statue, the rose he had given her held in her soft white hand, and its delicately-tinted leaves ruthlessly scattered at her feet.

"Do you wish me to go then, Lillian?" he said. "And what shall I say to my mother?"

"That we shall be most happy to accept her invitation," she replied, and then, as he moved aside, she raised her eyes to his, filled with such love as he could not fail to understand.

But when he would have embraced her her manner as suddenly changed; she shrank from the arms he held out to her, and then, with a cold and loveless kiss, they parted.

Her first impulse as he turned away was to have recalled him to her, to have told him that she knew his secret, to have shown him that which would have condemned him, and heard his explanation, hoping yet in her great love that there was some escape from the mystery which surrounded it, that he was true—still true to her. But the pride she could not conquer restrained her, and when she would have called him by name her tongue refused its office. And so the last sound of his retreating footsteps went from her, and the cry, which came when it was too late, returned to her with the summer breeze.

She was alone, at least that relief was afforded her; there was no one to witness her sorrow, and so she threw herself on the velvet turf, her tears falling like dew on the green grass, the while her whole frame was shaken with her emotion, and the birds singing their glad songs over her head.

She arose then, gathering together the rose leaves from where she had scattered them in her anger, pressing them wildly to her lips, and speaking to them as though they understood her sorrow, and then she turned—to see Gipsy beside her.

"What a time you have been, Lillian!" she said. "Papa sent me to look for you. I have finished my letters long ago, and if we are going to Lady Mount Aven's, it is time we dressed; but where is Sydney?"

"Sydney," she repeated, in a dreamy tone, "he is gone—on the river with his friends." The words came from her in disjointed phrases, and then looking into Gipsy's velvet eyes,— "Have you and Sydney ever met before?" she asked.

"Why, what should make you think that?" she returned. "You know I have been away from home so long that I knew no one around Thorpe Grange."

"I thought you were strangers," Lillian said, "until—until I picked this up last night where you had dropped it," and she drew from her bosom the envelope over which she had shed so many tears the previous evening.

Gipsy took it from her. She knew what it contained, but she could not refrain from kissing it, even then.

"I hoped you would never have known, Lillian," she said; "but it is all over now," and she tore it into a thousand pieces, casting them to the wind.

"For my darling Maudie!" Those were the only words written on the back, but Gipsy remembered, too well, how her heart had leaped with joy when it came to her at the pension in Bruges, where she admitted she had known Sydney now two years since; but for nine months before she left she had heard nothing of him, and never seen him until they met that morning.

"But he did not call himself Sydney," she added. "Guthbert Montgomery was the name I knew him by, although I felt sure it was not his own. He told me he was heir to a large estate in England, but that owing to some misunderstanding between him and his father he could not return home then."

"And he was your lover, Gipsy?" Lillian questioned, in a cold, hard voice, for she knew when Sydney was away from Mount Aven, and on his return—it was scarcely three months after that—she had become his affianced wife.

"He was," Gipsy returned, with flashing eyes, "but he has evidently forgotten, or wishes to forget, all about it now."

"And you loved him, Gipsy?"

"I did."

It was all Lillian asked, and then as her sister's answer came she turned from the spot, linking her arm within hers.

"Come along," she said. "As you say, we shall be late."

They moved away then, the noontide sun throwing its bright rays on the turf where she and her lover had parted; and like a requiem over her dead hopes came the notes of the songsters in the branches above.

A short time after and they were wending their way along the shady path which, through a shrubbery, led them to the Mount Aven estate, Lillian the while like one in a dream, walking beside Gipsy, where she and Sydney had so often strolled together; but she never named him now, only speaking of Lady Mount Aven, whom she felt sure would welcome her so kindly; drawing her sister's attention to the beauties of the surrounding landscape, and then falling into silence, not until her ladyship, who, when she greeted them, noticed how ill she was looking, bursting into tears.

"My dear child, what made you walk, and all in the heat of the day?" her kind hostess said, ascribing, as she did, her emotion to the influence of the weather, the while Gipsy stood by, not knowing what to say.

But with a strong effort Lillian soon recovered herself.

"Forgive me, dear Lady Mount Aven," she said. "I am afraid I overtaxed my strength, but thought it would not be so hot walking through the woods," and she would have arisen from the sofa had not the elder lady prevented her, insisting on her maid, whom she had summoned, still bathing her temples with eau de Cologne, the while she waved to and fro an immense feather fan, which she carried.

"That will do, Symonds," she said, as Lillian insisted she had now fully recovered, and required that person's services no longer; and then her ladyship proposed they should adjourn to a marquee in the grounds, where lunch had been prepared according to her orders.

"It is so delightfully cool here!" she said, as she threw herself on the couch inside the tent, which was shaded by the large chestnuts spreading their full-leaved branches over it, entirely excluding the bright sun which glanced off, and spread its golden heat over the thick, green grass where the sheep rested beyond.

And Lillian became brighter, forgetting for the while her great sorrow, as her ladyship enquired on the charming grace of her sister, who was wandering hither and thither, in the full enjoyment of her new surroundings. "That boy will be baked!" Lady Mount Aven remarked to his lordship, who now approached where they were, referring to Sydney, who was supposed to be catching fish beneath a glaring sun.

It was the first time his name had been mentioned, and Lillian felt the blood flow from her face, leaving her deadly white.

"I do believe the child is going to faint again," her ladyship said, in an alarmed tone; but Gipsy making her appearance at the moment, declaring how frightened she had been at coming unawares on the figure of an old hermit in a cell, her attention was withdrawn from the other, who quietly recovered her composure.

But Lillian was glad when the afternoon had ended and their kind hostess had bid them adieu, after seeing them seated in the carriage which she insisted on ordering to convey them to the Grange; her ladyship the while thinking and wondering what it could be that had so altered her favourite, who had bid her adieu, kissing her tenderly, with the tears welling to her beautiful eyes, and not a word, not a simple message to her boy.

CHAPTER III.

"WRITE, papa, dear, to Aunt Agatha, and tell her I should so much like to visit her for a time. I know she would be glad to have me with her."

It was Lillian who, with her arms clasped around her father's neck, was thus begging him to send her from Thorpe.

"I am not well, dear," she pleaded, "and I feel nothing but a change will do me good. You will write, won't you?"

He looked sadly down on the thin white face upraised to his, and the banker wondered what it was that had come over his darling within the last few weeks.

He had even asked Gipsy, but that young lady had professed to be in perfect ignorance; although, whenever Sydney visited the Grange now, Lillian was always absent, and she was his only companion.

But it was not that he had forgotten her, nor had their last parting in the rose walk faded from his memory; but for some unaccountable cause which he could not fathom, she declined to see him from that day, until at last he began to weary of attempting to elucidate a mystery she was determined to conceal, and he began gradually, at first almost unknown to himself, to feel a pain for his wounded feelings in the society of the younger sister.

And thus it was when Lillian sadly turned her back on Thorpe Grange to visit the aunt to whom Mr. Glendelling, at her request, had written.

Aunt Agatha was a maiden lady, living in a large flat in the Grosvenor Mansions, where she enjoyed life with all its luxuries in the sole companionship of a favourite nephew, son of an only sister, who had died when he was but two days old, confiding him with her last breath to her care. And Miss Glendelling had accepted the charge, taking the helpless infant to her heart and home, and placing him on a footing a little above the pet dog and cat which hitherto had monopolised her affection.

At first Peter and Minnie declared open war at the intruder's advent, and even after a while,

when they had become more reconciled, resented the liberties little Bertie would take with their ears and tails, whose chubby arms frequently bore witness to what had passed between them.

But the twenty-five years which had passed since then had made sad changes in Miss Agatha's household. Poor Peter had gone the way dead dogs mostly do, carrying his stone with him to the bottom of the water which formed his grave, leaving Minnie to mourn his loss and live out her nine lives as best she might; and when Aunt Agatha received her brother's letter, she was only too glad that Lillian should make her home here as long as she liked.

She felt she wanted something else to pet; she said Bertie had grown too big to caress; she could never love another dog after poor Peter, whose successor—a horrid little pug her nephew had brought home—never took to her nor she to him; that she felt she had a vacuum in her big heart the love for her niece would fill. And so it was with open arms that the good lady received Lillian on her alighting from the carriage which had been sent to the Great Eastern station to meet her.

Aunt Agatha was alone when she arrived, Bertie being still at his club, his return remaining an uncertainty until a quarter of an hour previous to the dinner which, even for his pleasure, Miss Glendelling never allowed to wait. Therefore, six days out of the seven her nephew dined away from the Mansions; but on this occasion he entered within a few moments of Lillian's advent.

The girl had just released herself from her aunt's embrace, who insisted on conducting her herself to the pretty room she had had arranged for her, preceded by the little maid who had been engaged for her especial benefit, when Bertie presented himself before them.

"See, our Norfolk Lilly has arrived!" the elder lady said, addressing her nephew, who apparently had no eyes for anyone else as he fixed them on his cousin's face, and then he held out his hand kindly to her.

"I thought ladies from the country brought roses on their cheeks, but you will have to gather yours in town," he said.

A faint blush rose to her temples then. "I am tired," she said, "with the journey, that is all," and she raised her large blue eyes, which looked so sad, to his, and then, marshalled by Aunt Agatha, she left the room.

"The heat is enough to kill anyone," Bertie said, when left to himself. "I don't wonder at my pretty cousin looking white and thin," and he threw open another window, seating himself between that and the door, which his aunt had left unclosed, in a most delightful draught; Jack, as the pug was called, lay't panting at his feet.

"Charming little girl, isn't she, old fellow!" he continued, addressing his conversation to the dog, who seemed too fat to do more than look up, as much as to say it was all right; his master advising him the while that if he studied the comfort of his own position he would be very civil to the young lady in question. And no sooner did Lillian, with Miss Glendelling, reappear than, to show how he had profited by his lesson, Jack advanced to meet them, allowing his red rag of a tongue to express by sundry licks the affection he was anxious to bestow on her, the while his stiffly-curled tail wagged and wagged over his fat back, until in danger of rubbing off the coat with it.

"I wish you would dress for dinner," Miss Agatha said, addressing her nephew. "I have ordered it half-an-hour earlier, as this poor child must be famished!" and she poured out a glass of wine, which she insisted on Lillian drinking, to give her an appetite, as she said.

The dinner was ready to the moment, and Lillian did full justice to it. She was hungry after so many hours' abstinence, and there was a change in her surroundings which in part drove from her mind the sorrow which had lately so absorbed it.

Bertie was delightful, and she could not resist the flirtation which danced in his eyes and showed itself in his droll sayings, often calling for reproof from Aunt Agatha, who, with a

smile wreathing her mouth, declared he was incorrigible.

And if Lillian was happy on the first day, she became even more so as days verged into weeks, and the weeks became months.

Bertie, too, now seldom dined at the club, according to his former custom—an alteration in his habits which Miss Glendelling noted with delight, whilst in her own mind she created a romance she only longed to see realised.

But with Lillian it was different, and it was with a fear she could not hide from herself that she found that a something more than a cousinly love was showing itself in Bertie's affection for her.

She liked him more than any man she knew, but her heart had died to love on that day when, with Sydney's rose-leaves pressed to her lips, she had heard of Sydney's broken faith.

His letters, over which she had wept until they were all blotted and bleared, she had returned with the diamond eiret he had clasped around her neck, and the ring which had sealed their pledge to each other.

And then a letter had come to her from him, and for hours she had sat with it, feasting her eyes on her own name, written with his dear hand. She had even kissed what he had traced; and then the great wrong he had done her came to her remembrance, and with a pain like as if her heart was being torn from her, she returned that which would have opened her eyes to the injustice she was doing him, and he received his own letter with the seal unbroken.

From that day Sydney Mount Aven became an altered man; he even began to take a pleasure in the society of Gipsy, whom hitherto he had avoided, and her winsome ways at times caused him to forget for a while the sister whom he looked upon now as having trifled with his affections.

It was on one of these occasions they had wandered together to where the river flowed on peacefully beneath the autumn sky that she told him for the first time the resemblance he bore to someone she once knew.

"You remember," she said, "the first morning that I saw you, how stupid I seemed! I could not help it; I really took you for a Gathbert Montgomery whom I met when in Bruges."

"And were much disappointed when you found out your mistake!" he returned.

"It was only the likeness startled me for the moment," she answered. "I had no reason to be disappointed."

"Then this Gathbert Montgomery was not your lover?" he asked, a tone of jealousy in his voice.

"My lover!" and she laughed. "I never had one!"

They were very near to each other then, and she had raised those velvet eyes to his, so bewitching; the breeze from the water the while lifting the curls from her fair, smooth forehead, and he forgot all. Lillian and the past faded from his memory, as in that moment of intoxicating delight he took Gipsy to his arms and told her he loved her.

They moved on then, crushing the dead brown leaves beneath their feet, and the river went on its way with the white lilies floating on its surface.

CHAPTER IV.

"I HAD a letter from your father, Lilly, this morning," Aunt Agatha said, when a few days after they were seated in the breakfast-room.

Bertie had important business in the City, which had taken him out at an unusual early hour, leaving the ladies alone, which to Lillian was a relief, for she could not fail to see the turn his feelings towards her had assumed, and she daily dreaded the dénouement of his affection.

"Yes, auntie," she answered. "Any particular news, or is it a request that I shall instantly return to Thorpe Grange?"

"Further than sending his love, and trusting you are well, my dear girl, he scarcely names you, his mind evidently too fully occupied with Gipsy's prospects to leave room for anyone

else; but read for yourself," and Aunt Agatha handed her brother's letter across the table.

Mechanically Lily held out her hand, the colour going and coming beneath her fair skin. As Aunt Agatha had said, there was little in her father's letter concerning herself; he sent his love, so glad to hear she was deriving so much benefit from the change, and that was all; and then he went on to say that Gipsy's marriage with Sydney Mount Aven was now a settled point, that the wedding was fixed for the first week in November, for which great preparations were being made. Lily read so far, then laid down the paper which told her so much, giving truth to the tale her sister had confided to her, the while she thought, in the agony of her soul, how soon she was forgotten, and she faithful to the end to the man who had gained the full affection of her young heart.

She was about to return it to Miss Agatha when a postscript she had left unnoticed attracted her attention.

"Did Lillian ever tell you the reason of her parting with Sydney?—for that her visit to you was due to some misunderstanding between them I am convinced, and I am also perfectly sure that the fault lay with herself, by whom the engagement was broken."

Miss Glendell had not seen it either, and as she was absorbed in the contents of other missives which had arrived by the same post, Lily tore it off the letter, which she returned to the envelope. She felt she could not bear to be questioned and her heart bleeding the while, for try as she would to drive all remembrance of him from her, she could not erase from her soul that love which had become her life.

In the days that followed came letters from Gipsy, speaking to her of the great happiness which was hers, and Lillian read them, the same cry rising to her lips. "Oh! my dear, my dear, and my love, the love I bore you was so great."

And then there was a cessation of Gipsy's correspondence; and as the time drew nearer for the wedding, Lillian's spirits appeared to revive. She even seemed happier in Bertie's society, who, with Jack on his best behaviour, would accompany her in her walks in the adjacent park, or prevail on her to drive with him round the enclosure.

It was after one of these excursions that they returned to the Mansions; she had been more than usually animated, and Bertie accordingly, in a seventh heaven.

Aunt Agatha was not at home, and so they had the drawing-room to themselves, the declining rays of the September sun throwing a soft light over the maroon velvet of the furniture, and making the thick pile of the carpet look richer, the while it turned as to gold Lillian's yellow hair.

"I wish you were always as happy as you are to-day, Lily; it makes a fellow feel so different," and Bertie felt so happy himself that he could not resist pinching Jack's ear, fearing to touch his cousin's, which he would much rather have done.

"What did you do that for?" she asked, as the dog gave a dismal yell; "to make him feel miserable, I suppose," and she caressed the poor creature, who, under the influence of her consideration, forgot his pain.

"I wish I was Jack!" Bertie said.

"Yes!" she answered, "I really cannot see the advantage you would derive by belonging to the canine tribe!"

"I do," he answered, "if then you would bestow on me the affection you do on him!"

She was stooping over the animal, but raised her head as he spoke, a frightened look coming into her large eyes, whilst from his beamed forth a love she could not mistake.

"I have wanted to tell you so long," he went on, "but you would not let me; but I can't help it now. Tell me, Lillian, you will try to love me. I have loved you from the first!"

He waited then, for her face had become white—so white in those few moments that he, like a child, had been pleading his cause; but as his voice ceased she seemed to recover herself, the while a tumult of thought passed through her brain.

"Bertie," she said, at last, placing her hand— it was so cold—on his, "you would not be happy

even if I said yes. Let us remain as we have been, dear—cousins, no more, and as such I will love you!"

"That is absurd, Lillian," he answered, impatiently. "What is there so repulsive in me that you should shrink from me? There is not a thing you could ask me that I would not do for your sake. Be my wife, darling, and in spite of yourself I will make you love me!"

He had come close to her then, so close that she could feel his warm breath on her cheek, she could hear his heart beating so near; and in that moment she almost felt tempted to listen to the words of love he was pouring into her ears.

She might, she thought, in the wealth of his affection, forget the past, and, in the richness of his love, even Sydney might be forgotten; but it was only a moment. At his name alone, as it recurred to her memory, everything vanished from her mind but that great love, which could never die.

"No, no!" she cried, tearing herself from his embrace. "Don't ask me, dear; I could never be your wife!"

He looked at her then, a world of pain and misery depicted on his countenance, each sentence she had uttered, coming as they did in hurried gasps, giving the death-blow to his hopes.

But she did not lift her head, only remaining by her face buried in her hands the while he stood before her, in that moment feeling less his own agony than hers.

"Lillian," he said, each sob she gave finding an echo in his breast, "look up, dearest; if not your lover, let me at least be your friend!"

She lifted her head, where the sunbeams still rested on the yellow hair.

"Friends, Bertie! I hope we may be always that!" she answered, and then their lips met. She could not refuse him that, and a few moments after the door closed on him and his shattered hopes.

The following day, and a summons came from Thorpe, begging Lillian to return to her sister's wedding; and then it was when Aunt Agatha, after her departure, told him how she had begged to remain in London, that Bertie knew why it was they were but cousins.

But when again at the Grange, Lillian's pride came to her rescue, and no one would have guessed that the while she was taking such interest in her sister's approaching nuptials that her own heart was breaking, and she ever breathing a prayer to Heaven to give her strength to the end, to hide the pain which was gnawing at her life-strings.

But she had so schooled herself that she could even meet Sydney unmoved, raising her eyes to his, when he clasped the hand she had held out, and then she would have turned away, had not a look she could not understand come into his.

At first a temptation came over her to ask him why he had so deceived her; but, as the door opened and Gipsy entered the room, it was gone.

It was very dreary now about the Grange, and the wind roused and sighed in the bare branches, while the woods were strewn with brown dead leaves; and the sky was overcast with dark grey clouds which, early as it was, the folks around said betokened snow.

Lady Mount Aven expressed a wish to see Lillian alone, when she heard of her return to Thorpe. It was so unlike her favourite to ask as she had done, she said; and she could not be persuaded but there was some mystery she could not understand; for, as she told his lordship, much as she admired Gipsy, she could never have the same affection for her as she had for her sister, and, although her own son, she considered Sydney had acted shamefully.

So Lillian went, refusing the escort of father, sister or servant, and threading her way along the familiar path until she entered Mount Aven itself.

She was glad of the escape from the surroundings of the Grange, where, every hour, every minute, she was reminded of her lover's parody; her mind so occupied, as she pursued her way, that she almost screamed with alarm as she saw the figure of a man but a few feet from where

she was. She merely saw his face for one moment, and then he had vanished in the gloom.

"I am so glad to see you, my child!" Lady Mount Aven said, when, a few moments after, Lillian was shown to the room where she was. "His lordship and Sydney are both out, and we can have a nice chat by ourselves."

"I just met him—Sydney, I mean," she returned, when free from her ladyship's embrace.

"Met Sydney!" Lady Mount Aven exclaimed. "Impossible! He went with his father in the carriage to the cathedral, where there is a special service this afternoon. Why, where did you see him, or fancy you did?"

"In the wood, as I came along," Lillian answered; "but I only saw him for a second."

Lady Mount Aven looked at her.

"What can the child mean!" she said. And then, ascribing the impression she had formed that she had seen Sydney to allowing her mind to be influenced by a mystery she was unable to fathom, she let the matter rest.

But the September afternoon was soon past, Lillian drinking tea with her ladyship in her boudoir, and still the disappointment remained in the elder lady's mind, that she could gain no clue from the other to the cause of her breaking her engagement with her son.

But five o'clock soon came, and carriage-wheels were heard crunching over the gravel drive, only a few minutes elapsing, when Lord Mount Aven and Sydney re-entered the mansion.

"You have not been in the woods during the afternoon, have you?" her ladyship asked, addressing the younger man, the while her husband was shaking hands with her guest.

"In the woods! I do not understand! I have been with my father all the time, as I thought you knew." And Sydney looked strangely at his mother, wondering what could have made her ask such a question.

After that Lillian soon said good-bye to her kind hostess.

The banker's carriage was awaiting her, and she was glad to throw herself back amidst the cushions, and think over the strange episode of the meeting in the wood.

"It was Sydney or Sydney's ghost," being the only answer which came to the question she kept continually asking herself. "Who could it be!"

CHAPTER V.

AUNT AGATHA, at her brother's request, had at last consented to be present at her niece's wedding.

"I suppose it would be unkind to refuse further," she said. So, with strict injunctions to Bertie to keep good hours during her absence, and instructions to the servants not to forget Minute's meals, she wrote to Lillian to say they might expect her the day previous, and accordingly left London on that date.

A week was the time she specified she could leave home—not a moment longer. For she felt sure, notwithstanding all his promises, that boy would be in mischief as soon as she was away.

Mr. Glendell had sent the carriage to the station at the time the train was due, but the autumn afternoon began to wane, and still no sign of its coming in.

The coachman was growing impatient, but not more so than his horses, who chafed at the delay, and had to be driven a short distance, then back again, to keep them in good temper.

After the fourth of these journeys had been accomplished, with the same result, Slack grew restless too, apparently thinking the station-master was in some way accountable for this want of punctuality.

"Just you get down, and ask that 'ere cove if this train is a comin' to-day or not," he said to the footman, as he reined in his horse, who began to paw the ground, evidently sharing the irritability of their driver.

James was not a second executing this order, returning with a scared and frightened face, to

say there had been an accident on the line, and a train had been despatched to bring on the passengers; when, as the last word was uttered, could be seen the white curling smoke of the approaching engine.

"There she comes too," Slack answered, referring to the train. "You run and see who's injured and who's not, for I can't leave the horses; but I trust Miss Glendell's hair's among the wounded."

A few more snorts, and it ran slowly up by the platform, now crowded with anxious friends and relations, to whom, after having waited with maybe more patience than the banker's servants, the painful news had been conveyed, the while the officials, all in readiness to give the assistance required, gently moved them aside, so as not to obstruct their movements.

Quickly the doors were opened, those who were uninjured, with white faces and nervous tread descending to the platform, whilst many a ghastly burden was borne to the room set apart to receive them, to wait identification.

It was with difficulty Aunt Agatha could compel her limbs to perform their duty, she was trembling so terribly; and it was with a prayer of thankfulness that she espied her brother's livery, and a little behind, hurrying onward—for the news of the accident had already reached the Grange—the banker himself.

"Thank Heaven, you are safe, Agatha!" he said, as he grasped his sister's hand. "We shall be home in a few moments, where I left the girls in terrible suspense, Lilly begging so hard to accompany me; but I told her it would only delay moments that might be precious."

But Miss Glendell could say but little, even then in her imagination hearing those fearful shrieks, which she put her hands to her ears to endeavour to shut out the while she closed her eyes, fearing to open them on that fearful scene.

"Dear, dear auntie, I am so thankful you are safe!" Lillian said, when the carriage drove up, and she, with Gipsy, rushed out to meet her.

"My escape was miraculous," Aunt Agatha replied, shuddering the while, as she told them how, in the same carriage with herself, a mother and her child were killed. "But how I shall get back to town I don't know," she added, "for I think I would rather walk to London than trust myself in a train again."

Whether there were any among the injured belonging to the neighbourhood Mr. Glendell did not wait to inquire, so anxious was he to convey his sister to the Grange without delay, hurrying her forward that she might not see the dead as they were carried within. That it had run into the up train for London was all even Slack had ascertained with regard to the mishap.

"Sydney will be sure to know particulars when he comes this evening," the banker said, and it was not with a little impatience that they awaited Sydney's coming.

Aunt Agatha had so far recovered, when descending from her room to which Lillian had accompanied her, that she could collect her thoughts sufficiently to consider the effect the news would have on Bartie when the account of the accident would appear in the evening papers.

"Let a telegram be sent at once," she said to her brother, "or the boy will be here for a certainty."

But Bartie was at the theatre when it arrived, and when he read it on his return very late, it was the first intimation he had had of the occurrence.

But Miss Glendell was content. She had, as she thought, relieved his mind; and by the time dinner was over had fully recovered from the effects of her severe shaking, and was quite anxious to be introduced to Gipsy's future husband.

But in vain Gipsy listened for his accustomed knock, straining her eyes the while as, seated by the window, she watched that she might catch the first glimpse of his approaching figure through the deepening gloom; but the shadows grew darker and more dark, and all without became hushed with the stillness of night, the silent stars coming out one by one, and the earth beneath wrapped in quiet rest, and still he did not come.

"What can detain him, father!" she asked, slowly advancing to the banker's side, her large eyes filled with an unspeakable fear, gaining little comfort from the assuring tone in which he whispered a reply; the sound even of Lillian's voice, who was singing a song Aunt Agatha had wished for, irritating her in her state of nervous dread. "It is ten o'clock, papa, dear!" she said again, drawing his attention to the timepiece which ticked off the minutes regardless of the girl's suspense. And then the violent ringing of an outer bell caused all to start.

"At last!" Gipsy cried, and would have moved forward to meet her lover when the door opened, and a servant alone appeared, bearing a silver salver, on which was a letter for his master.

"The man is waiting for an answer, sir," he said, when, telling him to stay a moment, Mr. Glendell broke the seal.

It was from Lord Mount Aven. A few hasty words, so ciphered as to speak plainly of the agitation under which they were written.

"I pray you come at once. I have sent my carriage. Something wonderful, not unmix'd with pain, has happened."

"G M."

"In a second I will be ready," he said, and he arose with the intention of following the servant to the hall, when, in turning, he saw Gipsy.

She was looking into his face, the tears standing in her soft eyes, now so sad; but he had no time then to enter into explanations, so he kissed her, bidding her cheer up, it was all right; and then telling Aunt Agatha and Lillian that Lord Mount Aven had sent for him, left her standing there, and that terrible fear driving her mad.

"Thank Heaven, you are come, Glendell!" his lordship said, when a short time after the banker was shown into the room where he awaited him, passing up and down the velvet pile of the carpet, unable to subdue the excitement which had made him in that short hour like to an old man.

He held out his hand, which shook visibly as the other took it in his grasp, and he could see the muscles of his face twitch with the force of his feelings.

"My boy, my poor boy, you have heard of the accident on the line!" he said, and then letting his head drop, he buried it in his hands, while sobs like groans came from his breast.

And Mr. Glendell stood before him, for the moment unable to realise the extent of his sorrow; and then, as its meaning came to him, his thoughts flew back to the Grange, and in his mind he saw there a girl watching with large, sad eyes, watching into the night for the lover whose voice maybe she would never hear again.

"I was unaware your son had left Mount Aven!" he said, his voice the while trembling almost as that of his listener. "Is he seriously injured?"

But his lordship seemed not to hear, only rocking himself to and fro in the chair, where he had now seated himself, some moments elapsing before he raised his head, when he appeared suddenly to be aware of the other's presence.

"My fault, it was all my fault," he murmured, and then, rising, he bid the banker follow him from the room.

"The doctor is with him now," he said. "Let us hear if he gives any hope. He seemed dead—yes, as dead when they brought him in!"

It was more to himself than his companion he was speaking as they passed along, where from each side of the long gallery Mount Aven's dead and gone looked down on them in the drows of times long past.

At the farther end a door was partly open, and, as they advanced towards it, the sound of a woman in great grief was distinctly audible. It seemed to recall the nobleman to himself, and he appeared better able to bear his own grief the while another's was present with him.

"It is her ladyship," he said, turning; "the

shock has completely overwhelmed her," and then he led the banker within.

A fire had been freshly ignited, the light from which, with the exception of two waxen candles, was all that illumined the apartment. Around the bed from which they were shaded two gentlemen were standing, one on each side, and Lady Mount Aven on her knees, her head buried in the coverlet, and her hand convulsively clasped in that of a third, who, as one dead, was extended on it.

The doctor was one, who moved when his lordship with Mr. Glendell entered.

"There is hope, my lord," he said, "but extreme quiet is absolutely essential."

He turned then, giving a few instructions to the nurse who was awaiting him, and impressing on her mind the necessity that Lady Mount Aven should be made to see that her son's life depended on the restraint she could be brought to put on her own feelings; and then they heard the wheels of his carriage crunching on the fresh-straw gravel as he drove from the Park.

But there was little call for the nurse's admonitions, for each was too occupied with their own thoughts, while sadly they looked on the prostrate form before them, to give utterance to the grief which was throwing a gloom over all, which but a short time since had been so bright.

Her ladyship had arisen at her husband's approach, looking with streaming eyes on her son, who lay like one dead before her, the while the banker could ill restrain his grief as he thought not of himself, but of his darling, his Gipsy, and she still looking out on the still, calm night.

He seemed unconscious of aught else then, as he gazed on the lad he had parted with in the full enjoyment of youthful life but a few hours back, now lying before him so calm, so still, until a hand laid on his shoulder aroused him to a sense of his situation.

"We had better follow my father and mother now."

He turned then, a sense of supernatural fear entering into his mind, when the voice he knew so well fell on his ear, and he raised his eyes to let them rest on—

"Sydney!"

CHAPTER VI.

"I AM afraid I frightened you," he said, looking on the banker, who had apparently lost all power to reply, only viewing the man before him as though he expected him each moment to glide into space.

But Sydney's touch upon his arm seemed to recall him to himself when, regarding him with a puzzled expression of countenance,—

"I—I do not understand," he said, and then he let his gaze wander to where, with the nurse smoothing his pillows, lay Sydney's second self.

"Has not my father told you?" the other asked, following the direction of his eyes. "He is my twin-brother, Geoffrey—the eldest, you know, whom all thought dead; but let us go down now, and he will tell you all about it."

Mr. Glendell did not answer then, only treading in the footsteps of his younger companion; not until he reached the room where Lord Mount Aven awaited him, fully realising the truth of Sydney's statement.

"Yes," his lordship answered in reply to his question. "My poor boy, I was too hard on him, you know, apparently—at least, so he thought—placing more value on a few paltry thousands than on him; and yet," he added, "had he only known what a heavy heart I have carried since that day when I received intelligence that he had died, and was buried in a foreign country, he would have thought differently. It was the last time we met. You know, Glendell, how harassed I was to raise the sums necessary to satisfy his creditors; that I told him he was a disgrace to the name he bore, that he was never to call on me again, for from that day he was no longer son of mine. No sooner said than repented of. But he took me at my word; and then, you know the rest. They sent me the certificate of

his death, until then, as they told me, being in ignorance as to his identity."

But the banker still stood, unable to articulate the reply he would have given, thinking less, in that moment, of the noble lord who, with bowed head, was seated before him; less of Sydney who, with folded arms, was also thinking—thinking deeply, as he was, than of the girl he had left at the Grange, with dark sad eyes, looking far into the night, wondering the while the effect it would have on her.

He made a movement then, as if to depart, pointing to the clock the while, and saying they would be so anxious at home that he must go now, but would call in the morning.

"It will be too late to expect you to-night, Sydney," as the youth moved also towards the door, and then he pressed the nobleman's hand, as one alone expressing the sympathy he felt.

A few moments after and he was being borne to the Grange. Gipsy nervously listening for the sound of the approaching wheels, a spasm of fear passing over her face, when he alighted at the entrance door, and alone.

"I told you it was all right, my darling!" he said, in answer to the mute appeal on the upraised face. "Sydney is safe, but an unexpected occurrence has prevented him coming to-night until now, and that is too late."

"Dear me!" Aunt Agatha said, who had made sure that nothing less than Sydney having been killed was the reason of her brother being summoned at such an hour to Mount Aven. "Then what on earth, James, did his lordship require you for?" she asked.

"His son is injured, seriously injured," the banker replied, "but not Sydney," and then he pressed Gipsy's hand, who had nestled so close to him.

"His son! I thought he had but one?" his sister answered.

"And he, too, until to-day it was revealed to him that the eldest, whom he supposed to be dead, is still living," the other replied.

Aunt Agatha for a moment was silent, the while she turned over in her mind what it all meant, as she removed her spectacles, wiping the glasses carefully, and gazing at her brother with an incredulous stare.

"Impossible!" she said, "some impostor most likely; if otherwise, Gipsy's lover, then, has no claim to the title."

But Aunt Agatha was the only one to whom this change in affairs had become apparent, Gipsy in that moment thinking less of any loss she might thus sustain than the relief her feelings had undergone, to know that Sydney was safe.

Not so Lillian, who had sat a little apart with strained ears, taking in all her father was saying, the while there recurred to her memory a scene in the past, when she had listened to a story from Gipsy's lips, which had made the blood to surge through her veins, the while she scattered the leaves of the rose he had gathered to the winds.

In the days that followed, the news soon spread through the neighbourhood of the return of the prodigal—days in which Lady Mount Aven anxiously watched his return to health, scarcely ever leaving the bedside until the Doctor assured her all danger was past, and unless she took the rest herself she so much needed, she it was, who would be his next patient.

Of course the wedding had been postponed, Aunt Agatha having returned to town by rail, suffering martyrdom, as she afterwards declared, until she arrived at her destination, and saw that dear boy, Bertie, awaiting her on the platform.

The days were gradually growing colder, with a sense of depression pervading the atmosphere, as the wind passed in melancholy moans amid the now almost bare branches, and rustled along the brown, dead leaves around the Grange.

Lady Mount Aven had expressed a wish that the girls should spend the day with her. Sydney was absent with his father, for a while, and she wanted to introduce them to her invalid, who was now so far recovered as to be able to recline on a couch in the drawing-room.

"He has expressed a great wish to see his future sister," her ladyship said, when on their arrival she, in reply to their inquiries, told them

how well he was getting. "He has not left his room yet, dear, but will shortly be in his accustomed place here," and she shook and patted the velvet cushion on which his head was so soon to rest, the while with different feelings the sisters awaited his coming.

"How strange you should have met him, Lillian, that day in the wood, when you mistook him for Sydney," Lady Mount Aven was saying, still speaking of Geoffrey.

"I remember," the girl answered. "And was it really him I saw? But why did he go away without—"

And then she stopped, for a grave look had passed over her ladyship's face, and Lillian regretted that she had spoken.

"Oh! it is all past now, dear," she said; "and had he not been such a foolish boy much trouble might have been spared; but like other young men, or a great many at least," her ladyship qualified, "Geoffrey had been a wild lad, causing his father an immensity of trouble; his creditors, like the waves of the sea, coming in as fast as they went out, until he declared he would have no further claim upon him. But I believe he still would have gone on borrowing and drawing to pay his debts had not his last peccadillo so outraged him that he sent him from him a disowned son—to die, as we were led to believe, in a foreign land."

It was to Lillian her ladyship was speaking mostly, sitting on the sofa prepared for her son, with the girl's hand clasped in hers. She was always her favourite, and she had never forgiven Sydney for changing his love to the younger sister.

Gipsy was scarcely listening, so wrapt was she in her own thoughts the while she looked out on the far expanse of green, with the red leaves chasing each other over its surface. The sun was shining, just marking where the river flowed on in the distance, and overhead, twitting and twitting preparatory to a final departure, the swallows were collecting for a final flight.

"Was it anything so very bad, then?" Lillian asked, regretting the question as soon as it had passed her lips, feeling within herself what right had she to dive into secrets which, doubtless, rested with them alone.

"I am so sorry, Lady Mount Aven," she added the next moment. "I really did not mean to draw confidences, which are yours to withhold."

"My dear child, it was nothing very dreadful after all," her ladyship returned, with a smile. "A love passage with some school-girl, which would have ended, as such flirtations invariably do, had no opposition been offered, when they would have tired of each other. There would have been a return of letters, a love-token or two sent back, and six months after they would have laughed at their own folly. Of course, Geoffrey fancied himself desperately in love, and declared that she, and she only, should be his wife. But I hear him coming, dear, so not another word."

The door opened then, and Lady Mount Aven rose up to meet her son, Lillian giving a start when he held out his hand in recognition of the introduction. He was so like Sydney that she no longer wondered that she had mistaken one son for the other on the occasion of that accidental meeting in the woods.

He was very pale in consequence of his late illness, and his hair, which had been closely shaven, was just beginning to grow, while the hand he held out was almost transparent.

"I am very glad to know you," he was saying; "my brother has spoken so much of you and your sister," and then he raised his head to meet the glance of Gipsy, who had turned from the window, standing a little within the shade of the heavy curtains, around which the shadows were already gathering.

"And is this to be my little sister?" he said, advancing, with a glad welcome in his tone, to the corner where she still stood, her face so white against the dark maroon of the drapery; and then a sudden ray of light fell on her, causing the arm he had extended to fall, as though lifeless, by his side.

"I am so glad," he said, but there was no

meaning in his words, only the finishing of a sentence he had begun; and then, at his mother's entreaty, he threw himself on the couch ready for him, closing his eyes as though overcome with the exertion he had undergone.

"Poor boy, he is still very weak," her ladyship said, thinking for the moment he had fainted, but a smile passing over his countenance convinced her to the contrary.

But for the rest of the day he scarcely seemed to notice Gipsy, his full attention being given to the elder sister; and it was only when they were leaving that he pressed her hand, holding it in his, and looking into her eyes, scarce less sad than his own.

"I shall be going away soon," he said, under his breath, that his words might reach her ears alone. "Your secret is perfectly safe with me. Heaven bless you," and when she would have opened her lips in reply he was gone, abruptly leaving them standing there, begging his mother the while to offer his apologies; but he felt ill and was afraid he had overtaxed his strength.

CHAPTER VII.

Week passed week, and still the wedding, which had been arranged to take place in the early autumn, seemed as far off as ever; and there was something in Gipsy's bearing towards her fiancé he could not understand, she avoiding him whenever the opportunity offered, and it created little surprise in the Thorpe world when it was rumoured in the fashionable world that the engagement between Lord Mount Aven's second son and Gipsy, or rather Maude Glendelling, was at an end.

"I knew what it would be when she found there was no chance of her ever being 'my lady,' a very plain girl, who had ever been envious of the banker's daughters, was heard to say on the occasion of an 'at home,' at which the subject was being discussed.

"I wonder whether he will return now to the milk-and-roses beauty!" another said, "whom I heard he discarded as soon as her pretty sister appeared on the scene."

"I should think she would have more spirit than to have anything more to say to him now," the young lady's mother replied; "but there is no doubt the Gipsy, as they call her, has played her cards cleverly, for she is to be the future Lady Mount Aven after all!"

"Is it possible!" rejoined from a dozen throats, and then there was a pause, as Lady Mount Aven herself was announced, the subject only alluded to after awhile to congratulate her ladyship on her son's approaching marriage.

"Quite a romance!" she returned, "and had we, his lordship and myself, not been in possession of facts which prove conclusively to the contrary, we, like others, should have thought it was merely the younger discarded for the elder brother. But it was not so," she continued, addressing a dowager, a very old friend, whom she had drawn on one side for the purpose. "You know what a trouble Geoffrey has ever been, notwithstanding that a better, nobler fellow never breathed; but then naturally you will say I am his mother, but if so, I am not entirely blind to his faults."

"But Lord Mount Aven seemed to see them sufficiently for both," was the reply, "Sydney always was his pet!"

"It was quite a mistake, but I am afraid Geoffrey thought so too," her ladyship answered. "However, after their last stormy interview, you remember, when the boy made up his mind never to return to Thorpe, so he went back to the Continent, and after awhile, so that Sydney might be his father's heir, had it reported that he was dead!"

"Just like his mad freaks; but how did he manage it?"

"In this way. It appeared, having met with some trifling accident when in Bruges, he was in an insensible condition conveyed to the hospital, and it was there—so he has told me since—the idea presented itself to him; and by bribes he caused the death of a young man, a stranger

in the next ward, whose identity they failed in obtaining, to be registered as his own, the certificate, with account of all burial fees, to be sent to Lord Mount Aven, Mount Aven Park, etc."

"What a foolish mad-brained thing to do!" "In the extreme," her ladyship coincided; "but that is not the romantic part of the affair. The very girl for whom had formed an attachment, when she was a resident in a pension there, and the acknowledgment of which made his lordship so furious—for you must know it has been arranged ever since their infancy that he should eventually have married his cousin, the Honourable Florence Gerard—turns out to be no other than Maude Glendelling, to whom he is now engaged."

A lull in the general conversation here caused her ladyship to pause in her confidences with her friend, and it was not for some time after that she could continue her story.

"But I cannot understand, Lady Mount Aven, how being in love with one brother, the young lady in question could betroth herself to Sydney!" her listener exclaimed.

"You must not blame her, dear!" her ladyship replied; "force of circumstances led her to do what otherwise she would never have consented to. The man she knew in Bruges she fell in love with as Guthbert Montgomery, a name Geoffrey had taken, or rather assumed, on the Continent. Well, when, owing to his accident, he was removed to the hospital, she, being in ignorance of what had occurred to him, concluded he had forgotten her. It was but a boy-and-girl attachment, and one, doubtless, which at that time she soon got over. But when, a few months after on her return to England, she saw in her sister's lover the man who had, as she imagined, played her so false, you can fancy her feelings; and, notwithstanding Sydney's assertions to the contrary, she would not, until Geoffrey himself came on the scene, believe otherwise than that Sydney and Guthbert were one and the same."

"How very unfortunate to possess such a likeness to anyone else!" was the rejoinder.

Lady Mount Aven smiled.

"In some cases, yes," she answered; "but all is well that ends well, and I am yet in hopes that Sydney and Lillian will return to their old love."

The Christmas festivities and reunions would work wonders, her ladyship was hoping, but *l'homme propose, mais le Dieu dispose*, and when the Christmas bells were ringing out the Christmas chimes Lillian was hovering between life and death beneath her aunt's roof.

Gipsy had, after their visit to Mount Aven, told her of the error into which she had fallen, with tears and entreaties begging her to forgive her for having wrecked her happiness; and Lillian had listened, with a dull sense of pain showing itself in her sad eyes, filled with tears which would not flow, letting her hand the while, so cold and pulseless, mechanically pass over the silken tresses of the girl who still knelt at her feet.

At first she could not speak, only a dry sob occasionally breaking from her; and then, with a strong effort, she so far recovered herself that she let her head, like a broken lily, bend, until her lips met those of the suppliant, still kneeling; when gently she raised her from her lowly position, and she was shedding tears of contrition on her shoulder, each pressed to each in that moment of their greatest happiness and suffering!

She arose then, staggering like a drunken man, until leaning on Gipsy for support she went from the room, and not till she had entered her own, relinquishing her arm.

"I am better now, dear," she said then. "Kiss me, darling. Good-night."

"Good-night, Lily!" was Gipsy's response, throwing her arms the while around her sister's neck and impressing kiss on kiss on her hot, burning cheek; and then she turned, leaving her standing, watching her retreating form, and that dull, weary pain making her to feel how gladly would she welcome even death.

The next day Aunt Agatha received a letter, just such another as on a former occasion she had penned.

"DEAREST AUNTIE,—I should so like to spend a short time with you and Jack. My love!—LILLIAN."

And Aunt Agatha had read the letter, passing it on for Bertie's perusal, who was her companion at the breakfast-table when it arrived.

"She could only remember Jack—a dog!" he said, in a hurt tone, while he returned it; and when Miss Glendelling raised her head, saying, of course she would be delighted to see the child, she fancied she detected something like a tear in his usually laughing eyes.

A few days after and Lillian arrived—so pale, so wan, that Aunt Agatha declared she was going into a consumption, shuddering each time the sound of the cough from which she was suffering broke on her ear.

But Lily smiled away her fears.

"I am only tired, auntie, dear!" she said, "and have caught a slight cold"; and then moving from her embrace she held out her hand to Bertie, who, with Jack demurely seated beside him, was watching the scene.

"Please don't forget the dog," he said, in a half satirical tone, after releasing her hand, which had made him start—it was so hot and burning; when, with a laugh, she acknowledged the presence of her canine friend, who in brawling delight began exercising different capers around her.

But the first excitement over, Lillian experienced a state of languor and depression for which she could not account, and when she would have arisen from her bed on the following morning her limbs appeared stiffened with acute pain.

"I was sure you were ill, dear!" her aunt said, when she had been called to her side, the while she, in her turn, seemed to think alone of the trouble she had unconsciously brought on her kind relatives.

"I had better go home before I am too ill to be removed, auntie," she said. "I could not stay to be a burden on you."

But Miss Glendelling kissing her said she should be exceedingly cross did she think of such a thing. She could send for Dr. Brabant, and if he said it was nothing serious, why there was no occasion to write to her father further than she had arrived all safe, but was slightly indisposed after the journey.

But it was with a very grave face that the doctor regarded his patient a few hours later.

"She is very ill," was the opinion he expressed. "But you know, Miss Glendelling," he added, "a stitch in time saves nine, and we may be able to ward off the attack."

However, notwithstanding precautions taken and remedies given, each succeeding day found Lillian worse, until Aunt Agatha could no longer withhold the sad truth from her brother.

"There is no immediate danger," she wrote, "but I would rather you and Gipsy were here until the crisis is past, and so the day following the banker with daughter arrived at the Mansions."

She had been less quiet during the hours preceding their coming, and Dr. Brabant still gave hopes she would pull through, but when Mr. Glendelling and her sister stood by her bedside she was unable to recognize them.—Her mind still reverting to scenes in the past when she and Sydney were betrothed to each other; then her eyes suddenly lighting on Gipsy her features appeared to return to her.

"It is not true, is it, dear!" she asked, holding out her hand to her sister.

"What is not true, Lily?" Gipsy questioned.

"That you took him from me, that Sydney is going to be your husband!" and then she looked into her eyes for a moment with a burning, searching glance, the while she passed her hand across her own, as though to clear away the mistiness from her vision; and poor Gipsy, with bowed head, would soothe her in her ravings, her own heart the while breaking, feeling, as she did, that she was in some way responsible for her illness.

Bertie, notwithstanding all his entreaties, was strictly forbidden to enter the sick room, and he would anxiously await in the corridor with-

out like a child, begging them to tell him if she would die.

"Her life was in the hands of Providence," was all the reply he could get, and then he would go down and bury his face in the cushions, sobbing out his great grief, as in his infant days he had there wept through some baby sorrow.

It was on one of these occasions Aunt Agatha came to him.

"Bertie," she said, her voice trembling with the emotion she could so ill conceal, "you would like to bid her good-bye, would you not?"

He arose then with a sudden start. He could not speak, with a great gulp, suppressing his grief, the while he followed to where Lillian lay so pale, so still, that for the moment he thought he was too late.

Around her were assembled those who loved her so dearly, but none with a bigger heart than he who even in that moment felt a pang of jealousy shoot through his frame, as he witnessed another whose hand enclosed hers as it lay on the silken coverlet; and in his agony he turned to the window, that they could not witness his suffering.

And the snowflakes came down slowly, solemnly, wreathing the frosty pane with a white, thin veil, and falling until the earth became hidden beneath the shroud they had woven.

And then he turned, for the tone of her gentle voice had broken on the stillness; but it was Sydney's, not his, name that had trembled on her lip.

"All for him!" he mentally groaned, "and I loved her so fondly." But even then he almost forgot his great grief, when, moving towards the assembled group, her gaze for a moment settled on his face, and with a faint smile controlling her pale lips she held to him her thin, transparent hand.

"Hush! hush!" It was Aunt Agatha who had led him away, for his sorrow, his love for the dying girl, was terrible to behold; and it was with difficulty they could raise him from the bed where he had buried his head, his whole frame shaking with the intensity of his emotion, Sydney the while standing on the other side, like one transfixed, by the weight of the blow which had come to him.

It was then that the gentle eyes closed, a heavenly smile overshadowing the pallid lips, and they all thought the end had come.—Dr. Brabant alone approaching to her side, the while each left the chamber, Aunt Agatha only staying to cast a last look on her darling's face.

She turned then, burying her own in her hands, when a touch upon her shoulder made her start. It was the physician.

"She is not dead, Miss Glendelling," he said; "this sleep will save her. But—" and he looked solemnly on the still form, scarcely seeming to breathe, as it lay there so calm, so quiet, amid the lace of the embroidered pillow. A sudden awakening would prove fatal.

CHAPTER VIII.

MANY weeks passed by after that night on which loving eyes had, as they thought, gazed for the last time on Lillian's face; and still—under Aunt Agatha's care, and Dr. Brabant's skill—she lived, struggling back to life, fighting each step with death, until in the end her youth and vitality conquered.

The winter had fled, she almost unconsciously the while of the terrible cold which had filled many a home with poverty and trouble. And when once again she looked out upon the moving world, tiny leaves had commenced to break forth on the bare, brown branches.

Mr. Glendelling had repeatedly made journey to town, hoping each time to take back his darling with him to the Grange; but his sister seemed so aggrieved at his persistency in endeavouring to persuade her to leave the Mansions, that at last he consented to press the point no farther, until—the heat becoming unbearable to be borne in London—she should herself bring her back to Thorpe.

Gipsy's wedding had taken place, and she with Geoffrey were spending their honeymoon in the old haunts where they had first met and loved. And so, until Lillian's arrival with her aunt, it was very lonely and miserable for the banker, and a glad light came into his eyes when once again his home was gladdened by the presence of his beloved ones.

"I have brought the boy, you see, James!" Aunt Agatha said, alluding to Bertie, who in his turn had brought Jack, so that the loneliness of which her brother had so wofully complained promised to be a thing of the past.

"I am glad of it, Agatha!" was his hearty response. "And if he can't handle a gun, I undertake to say he will soon learn under Jepson, my gamekeeper's, tuition to bring down some Norfolk pheasants. But who is this!" he said, turning, as a shadow was thrown across the window; and another step was heard approaching to where they still stood, with the summer's sun throwing its light on their happy faces.

"I hope you will not be angry, sir, but I saw the carriage coming up the drive, and I thought I might follow."

It was Sydney, scarcely awaiting the reply Mr. Glendell made him, when he advanced to where the elder lady was sitting, Lillian—fair and fragile, though with the bloom of health on her lovely face—beside her; and Bertie, although he had long known now that she was also to become a member of the Mount Aven family, could not witness, without a twinge of jealousy, how her blue eyes—the eyes he loved so madly—had beamed with happiness as they fell on the form of his rival.

Years, many years, each successive one blinding them nearer to each other, making their lives to be one continual sunshine, had come to Lillian and Sydney in the home they had made amid the Devonshire hills and vales, assigned them by Lord Mount Aven, Geoffrey, with his bride, residing on the Continent, until, for the last time, a sense of home-sickness came over him, driving him back to Mount Aven as it had done on that day when Lillian had come across him in the Mount Aven woods; but this time a presentiment that he was not long to enjoy the happiness he had at last attained had taken hold of him—a presentiment which proved but too true; for he had but succeeded to the title, his father's death occurring within a few weeks, when he was laid by his side in the family vault.

"Don't refuse me, Lillian," the bereaved wife and mother wrote. "Gipsy is going to reside at the Grange, and I shall be so lonely if you and Sydney will not come here."

And so they went, and with them the youthful lord, a tiny tyrant, with Lillian's eyes. But he is not spoiled alone by Lady Mount Aven, for there is a big fellow, his dark hair streaked with grey—though his years scarce number thirty—who for hours will tend his manifold wants, and minister to his every wish.

It is Bertie, come to live with the banker now, for Aunt Agatha has joined the majority; and though his great heart has still its aching moments, he is never so happy as when, with the golden head of Lillian's boy resting on his shoulder, he sits with Lillian's child upon his knee.

[THE END.]

The leaf of a creeping moss found in the West Indies, known as the "life-plant," is absolutely indestructible by any means except immersion in boiling water or the application of a red-hot iron. It may be cut and divided in any manner, and the smallest shreds will throw out roots, grow, and form buds.

On the accession of a new Emperor of China, he goes in solemn state to the Temple of Heaven, in Peking, and formally announces to his imperial predecessors the new titles and dignities which he has assumed. These ancestors are then dutifully invited to the banquet of commemoration, where seats are duly reserved for them.

OUT OF THE MIST.

—10:—

"How it rains!" I cried, as I entered the comfortable parlour at Aunt Mary Deane's, where my demure little cousin, Gerlie Wells, a visitor, like myself, was sitting at a window looking, with her large, soft, hazel eyes, at the drenched trees that shaded the avenue leading to the high road, an eighth of a mile or so beyond.

"How the rain pours, Gerlie," I repeated. "It is too bad, and Dick French promised to call and take you out riding with him this afternoon."

Gerlie turned her head quickly from the window, and lifting her eyes to mine, said in a low voice,—

"I am not disappointed! Mr. French should at least have had the courtesy to intimate that he desired me to ride with him before he thought of disposing of my person or time!"

"Oh, oh! Cousin, I see—humph, I see! A lovers' quarrel. So you and Master Dick are at war with each other—and about what, pray?"

"Oh! how cruel you are!" sobbed the little beauty, as she rose to her feet, and, in a paroxysm of tears, was about leaving the room, when I caught her hand in mine at the door's threshold, just in time to prevent her escape.

"Pardon me, Gerlie," I whispered. "I am truly sorry for my rudeness—my impertinence. You know there are such things as lovers' quarrels, and I of course came to the sage conclusion that, from the remarks you just now dropped, you and Dick had been showing your claws to each other."

"Oh, Ned!" said my cousin, as her soft, sweet eyes again filled with tears.

I felt hurt.

"Why, Gerlie," I responded, apologetically, "I spoke metaphorically. You know," I added, and somehow my voice as I spoke had a tone of tenderness in it I could not at the moment account for, "I would be the last person in the world to wound your feelings—to—to trample on so sensitive a spirit."

Before I had well concluded this little speech the witch had gently—so gently that I did not notice it—withdrawn her hand from mine, and was on the second landing of the stairs on her way to her own room.

"Confound Dick French," I said to myself, as I turned to the window at which I had found my cousin sitting; "what business had he to steal the affections of such a pretty harmless dove as Gerlie. But it is always the way with these underdogs, hulking fellows. The women first commence pitying, and end by loving them, while those who ought to have some claims on their attention are passed over—entirely forgotten, in fact."

Now, why did I, on this particularly rainy afternoon, talk in this fashion? Hitherto I had looked on a union between Gerlie and Dick as a matter of course, simply because, as I supposed my good-natured, match-making Aunt Mary desired it; and I employed my vacation in shooting and fishing, and other such sports as the country offered me.

But now, having nothing on hand to engage my attention, I began to recall with pleasure the sweetness of my cousin's countenance; and somehow or other a feeling of dislike to my old school-fellow, Dick, rose up within me. In fine, I began to question his right to the hand of Gerlie, even if my aunt plotted in his behalf.

It was very true he was rich, I argued with myself; but will happiness be insured by the free use of money? Is not Gerlie's happiness worth more than show or wealth? I'd not see her sold in this way. Surely the sweet girl must have a will—a preference of her own. If she loves Dick, well and good, but—

"If she does not, what then?" said a feminine voice, but very business-like in its tone, behind me.

I turned on my heel and confronted my aunt. "If she does not, aunt, then it would be a sin to insist on the marriage."

"Would you throw aside an eligible match

when it was within your power to confer it on your niece?"

"How do you know that the match is eligible? Dick French is rich, I know; but he is conceited—he is an ass, a humbug—he was so at school. And—and would you intrust the happiness of such a one as Gerlie Wells—your dear sister's only child—to a man who—who—"

"Humph!" exclaimed my aunt, as she looked me directly in the eye. "I never thought of that. Bitten! Caught!"

And, without another word, she walked out of the apartment.

"Bitten! Caught! What does she mean?"

I had no time to ponder the remark of my relative. I heard the gallop of a horse in the avenue as my respected aunt and hostess closed the door behind her. I knew who was coming—who would come if it were literally raining minie-balls on the earth.

It would have helped me much if I could at that moment have enjoyed a good swear (as women do a "good cry"), at the approaching visitor; but before I well knew what form of oath I should invent and which would be appropriate to the present case, my cousin again entered the room, and stepping up to me, said, as she looked down the avenue:

"Is not that Mr. French's horse, Ned?"

The voice was so very steady, and the question so indifferently put, that I began to wonder within myself if there really was a lovers' quarrel after all.

"Yes, cousin," I answered, "that is Mr. French's horse, and I suppose Mr. French is on the animal's back. What a devoted cavalier he is, to be sure, to ride six long miles on such a day as this, to see his—"

"You are in error, Ned," interrupted my cousin, in her calm, indifferent voice. "Oh!" she suddenly cried, and as she spoke her eyes lighted up, and the rich blood suffused her neck and face in one soul-ecalling blush, "there is Dick! Is he not good to visit us this stormy weather, and relieve us of its tedium?"

"Hem!" I exclaimed, not looking at her, but straight at a garbled oak that stood some little distance out of the direct line of vision.

"It is delightful!" I heard the little witch murmur, in her soft, musical tones.

I looked to where she had stood a moment before, but the place was vacant. Save myself, the room was tenantless.

"Well, what am I to make of this woman?" I cried. "The sex is, I know, preposterous; but that Gerlie should, a brief hour ago, denounce Dick for his presumption in offering to escort her over the country on horseback, and now, casting aside all reserve, run out in the rain to embrace him! Oh, Gerlie, if you did but know how madly I—"

"Hallo, Ned, old fellow!" cried my school chum, as he entered the parlour, escorted by my aunt, and followed by Gerlie.

"Hallo, yourself, Dick!" I returned, my heart sinking within me at the thought that such a burly fellow as French should make love to and be accepted by my pretty cousin, while I was away catching trout for their dinners!

I glanced at Gerlie. Her face was red as a peony. She held in her hand a note given her by French, which as she returned to the piano, she tore open and glanced hastily over.

"He has begged to be forgiven," I muttered to myself, as I saw a glad smile light up her countenance. "Happy dog!"

"Come with me, Dick," said my aunt to French. "Excuse us, Ned," she added, "for a few minutes, I wish to consult Mr. French on matters connected with the farm. Gerlie, will you accompany us?"

"Voted out, by George!" I growled as the trio, without further ceremony, left me in the undisputed occupancy of the apartment. "Now that Dick and Gerlie are all right aunt will doubtless hurry on the marriage! and then—why, then I suppose I'd receive my congé."

As I thus spoke, in the bitterness of my soul, my eyes rested on a sheet of paper that was lying on the carpet near the piano.

"That is Gerlie's note, I suppose. Of course

It is! Well, I'll pick it up and hand it to her when she returns."

I stooped to take up the *let-doux*, and as I caught it between my fingers, I could not help but notice that the words were traced by the hand of a woman, so delicate was the chirography.

"Not an apology from Dick after all," I murmured. "That's curious!"

Forgetful for the instant of the ungentleman-like course I was pursuing, my eye ran over a sentence on the first page, which struck me as somewhat singular. It was as follows,—

"Dear Gertie, you are no woman if you cannot make the man love you as passionately as you do him. You say he is in love at present with no one but himself—that was precisely Dick's case until he saw *Se*—"

Here the page ended; and, recalling myself, I blushed for the inconsiderateness of my conduct.

I folded the sheet carefully, and placed it in my vest-pocket, there to remain until I should have an opportunity of handing it to my cousin.

That night, notwithstanding the gale increased, my aunt and cousin were in the highest spirits. Gertie sang, played on the piano, and made of herself, in sheer playfulness, as much of a kitten as it is possible for a human being to do—and all to the undiminished delight of Dick French and my aunt.

I had to join in the sports of the evening, to disguise my chagrin; but in sourness of spirit I mentally swore at my aunt's guest.

At last, to my relief, Dick retired to his room. My aunt had gone before, at her usual hour, ten o'clock, and I was once more alone with dear Gertie, who immediately put on that demure look, which did not become her, but which she invariably wore when we were alone.

"Gertie," I said, in sheer desperation, "I wish I were a Quaker."

"A Quaker!" she repeated, and she opened wide her eyes as she spoke, waiting for some explanation of my meaning before she could make up her mind definitely as to my sanity.

"Yes," I said. "For then, when we happen to be alone, there would be a pair of us!"

"Ha! ha!" and the little witch chirruped like a bird at my conceit.

"Here is a note, addressed to you, which I found on the parlour floor, where I presumed you must have dropped it."

As I spoke, the dear girl's face became crimson, and her fair hand trembled as she extended it to receive the note.

"Dick is going to be married, Ned," she said, very softly, as she placed the paper in her bosom.

"The deuce he is!" I responded. "I suppose you know whom he is to marry?"

"Oh, yes," she answered. "I've seen her often—"

"In a mirror!" I groaned.

"In a mirror, Ned!" and the witch blushed scarlet. "Oh, no. His sister here says he is going to unite himself to *Miss*—"

"Then he is not going to take Gertie Wells from me!" I interrupted.

"Oh, Ned! how could you make such a mistake!" cried Gertie. "Why I never—"

"Hurrah! hurrah!" and I made the old homestead resound with my cries. "It's all right, then."

"Why, Ned, are you crazy!" cried my aunt, rushing into the room in her nightclothes, holding a lighted candle in one hand and a pitcher containing water in the other. "Is the house on fire?"

"No, aunt, but my brain is. Gertie," I continued, as I turned to my cousin, "may I hope?"

"To be sure you may," said my aunt. "That's what I invited you here for, you goose!"

"And Dick French?"

"Oh, he's my lawyer and general adviser. Poor fellow! he's going to make a Benedict of himself in a month or so."

"And Gertie?"

"She's gone to bed."

"May I vent—may I—"

"What?"

"Love her—ask her to be my wife, and she not refuse me. Oh, aunt!"

And the amiable lady burst into a loud fit of laughter.

"Ned," she said, as she regained her composure, "go to bed. To-morrow you'll understand yourself better; and it may be that Gertie will consent."

I followed my relative's advice. I went to my couch; I gathered its drapery about me; but my dreams were far from pleasant. I was haunted with the idea that Gertie would refuse me and run away from my persecutions with Dick French.

The next morning I was early at the brook. The trout snapped eagerly at the bait, and I soon had my basket well filled. I was on the point of returning to the house to breakfast, when whom should I meet in the path but Gertie.

How very beautiful she looked that morning! I know I must have said something exceedingly foolish to her, but as to what it was I have not the slightest recollection. I remember, however, putting an arm around her waist and placing a kiss upon her forehead.

She soon after disengaged herself and disappeared from the path.

Was it a dream I had had! Did I but conjure up a vision of love and beauty!

"No; it was a veritable interview. My aunt confirmed me in my impressions as to its verity during breakfast; and when Gertie made her appearance at the table a glance from her bright, loving eyes assured me that I had met no ghost near the brook.

Well, that was a good many years since; but I have never whispered (even in our most confidential moments), in my wife's ear the heinousness of my offences in reading a few misty lines in her correspondence, but for which I should never have summoned sufficient courage to tell how much I loved her or ask her to be mine for ever.

[THE END.]

WHAT CAN BE DONE FOR THE DEAF?

DEAFNESS is one of those misfortunes which seems to be borne and regarded as a "matter of course," yet the fact of deafness being so common amongst us only seems to emphasize the question, "What can Science do for the Deaf?" For what may be termed its companion sense—sight, much has been done, and the clever oculist with the skilled optician work wonders. To overcome defects of nature, or falling sight from advancing years, the wise man (or woman) will wear glasses; but those afflicted with deafness do not seem so ready to avail themselves of artificial aid. A heavy tax is placed upon the vocal organs of those who have to converse with a deaf person, and many are entirely debarred from so doing owing to the physical effort required in speaking loudly for any length of time. Then, why not make use of artificial aid? There are many makers of instruments for the deaf, notably Messrs. Rein & Son, of 108, Strand, London, who have prescribed and supplied their appliances to many members of Royalty and the nobility. Messrs. Rein keep instruments for every kind and degree of deafness, the use of which will enable any sufferer from this terrible drawback to take his or her part in the everyday occurrences of life without making any undue call upon the good nature and vocal powers of their friends.

THE newly-founded town of Triangle, in Texas, is laid out in the form of an equilateral triangle; its lots are triangular in shape, and the ground plan of each of the twenty-three houses which have thus far been erected there is three-cornered. The three principal streets are named Equilateral, Scalene and Isosceles, and the residents have even carried their curious idea into the local government, which consists of a so-called triangular council, having three members.

THE MYSTERY OF ALANDYKE.

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CHAPTER XV.

THAT first visit of Beatrice Stuart to the bijou villa was followed by many others. The wealthy bride and the beautiful, lovely singer became fast friends.

Isabel never clung to Bess as she had clung to her sister, but she was very fond of the girl whose life seemed so different to her own.

Beatrice's services were not required constantly at the concerts, and it grew into quite a custom for her to spend her leisure evenings at Mrs. Yorke's.

Harold looked on well pleased at the intimacy; as an artist he admired Bess's beauty, and she was so true and innocent, so simple and childlike, in spite of her strange position, that he desired no better companion for his wife.

"I should like to find someone very nice whom Beatrice could marry," the bride confided to her husband, when July was some days old, and the London season was waning.

"I don't think you would have much difficulty," returned the artist; "she is so pretty, any man would like her for the ornament of his house."

Belle pouted.

"But she wouldn't like any man, Harold; it must be someone very nice and uncommon."

Mr. Yorke laughed.

"I think you are more difficult to please than Miss Stuart would be herself."

"You don't mean Bess would accept the first man who proposed to her?"

"Don't snap my head off, Belle. I mean that if a man of good character and pleasing manner offered Beatrice Stuart his love I don't think she would refuse it."

"But—"

"She is not like her sister. The little Miss Stuart we knew at Alandyke would have scorned any man unless she loved him; her sister is of a different type. Unless I am mistaken Beatrice is formed to be loved, not to love."

"I don't see the difference."

"There is one, Belle. I can't explain it to you. If you were an artist, perhaps, you would have noticed it; some women feel love a necessity, the others only require to be loved."

"And which am I?" just a little crossly.

"A very charming combination of both."

The conversation broke off then, for the door opened to admit the girl who was its subject.

Two months of London life had given Bess a pretty air of self-possession, a nameless composure which had been quite wanting in the little music mistress. She wore a soft black dress (she, affected black, perhaps she knew how well it contrasted with her fair skin, and bright golden hair). Belle, who was resplendent in silk and jewels, gave a little sigh.

"You always look nice in anything. Now if I wore that dress I should be a fright."

"You couldn't," whispered Bess. "And so this is really my last evening with you! I can't believe it."

"Yes, we leave London to-morrow."

"Shall you go to Alandyke?" and her tone was very wistful.

"No, Uncle Jocelyn is still abroad. Don't look so disappointed, child; you would hear nothing at Alandyke. Lord Carruthers told me he saw the woman who was the last person to speak to your sister, and she asserts positively Nell took the road to Wharton."

"By the way, Belle," put in her husband, perhaps to change the subject, "Lord Carruthers is coming to dinner. I met him this morning, and he invited himself."

"He was here on Tuesday, and again last week. Beatrice, he always comes when you are here."

"Does he?"

"Yes, invariably. If you don't take care I shall be jealous. Lord Carruthers is a special favourite of mine."

"I don't wonder," said Bess, gently; "he

seems so good and kind, I think anyone he cared for would be safe from every trouble."

"He's a dear old man."

Bee looked surprised.

"You don't call him old, surely!"

"Nearly sixty," put in Mr. Yorke, gently, "according to the Peerage. What age did you guess him, Miss Stuart?"

"I! Oh, I never thought about his age; he seemed to me like one of the knights in the old romances."

"Your knight is coming," said Mr. Yorke, archly; and then the door opened to admit the brave old soldier, who had once laid heart and fortune at Nell Stuart's feet.

He had been fond of Nell; he had pitied her so intensely, but he already loved Beatrice better far. He was nearly sixty, and Bee was seventeen, but incredible as it seems, the bluff old soldier was completely captivated to the girl's sweet face. There was nothing rash or infatuated in his attachment; he had no intention of making the rest of his life miserable if he could not get Bee to pass it with him, only he wanted her, and he meant to ask her.

It was a very pleasant little party. The young host and hostess understood the art of entertaining thoroughly, and Bee and the Earl were not critical guests. When they went back to the drawing-room Miss Stuart sang two or three simple ballads.

"Don't," said Belle, as she began "In the gloaming." "That is such a sad song. I would rather have something cheerful. Remember this is our last evening."

The Earl looked disappointed.

"And you really go to-morrow!" he asked Belle.

"Really. I tell Miss Stuart she must make haste and leave London, too, now all our pleasant little meetings are broken up."

"I can't," said Bee, simply. "I must stay for Mr. Alastair three weeks longer, and then I expect I shall go in the provinces."

Mr. Yorke had lingered in the drawing-room to smoke a choice cigar. It suddenly occurred to the wife of his bosom he was a long time about it, and with a word of apology to the Earl she went in search of him.

Bee sat still on her music-stool with a strange wonder whether she should ever sit in that pleasant lamp-lit drawing-room again.

"Miss Stuart—Beatrice!"

She turned. The General had left his chair and stood bending over her.

"I want to ask you a question," he said, simply; "but you must answer me just as you please. Don't let any thought of my pain influence you. Bee, do you think it is possible for a girl to be happy with a husband old enough to be her father?"

It was a very different manner from that in which he had proposed to Nell; but then he really loved Bee, whereas in his former wooing pity alone had influenced him.

Beatrice Stuart looked intently on the ground, as though the pattern of the carpet interested her.

"I suppose so," she said, slowly, "if he loved her."

"Ah, but if she did not love him!"

Bee's blue eyes still regarded the ground.

"I think if a girl felt very sure she was dearly loved, if she admired and revered her husband, the years between them wouldn't matter. People would say nasty things, but—she would get older every day."

"I don't care what people say," said the old soldier, quietly. "Bee, is it cruel to ask you to link your bright youth with my grey hairs? Child, if you would come to me, no bride should ever be more tenderly idolized than my sweet girl-wife."

Bee raised her blue eyes half wistfully.

"It would make me very happy," she said, gently. "Only—"

"Only what?"

"I am so young. You might get tired of me."

"I'm not afraid of that; only, child, think of the long years between us."

"I hate young men. I always did, and"—

with a little sigh—"It must be so nice to be loved. Lord Carruthers, I have longed for love so much since I lost Nell."

"Nell would be glad to think her little sister was safe with me. Ah, Bee, it is only four months since I returned to England. I remember Jocelyn Leigh starting when I told him if I could find a wife I should be married, in spite of my years and grey hairs."

"I don't think I should like Sir Jocelyn."

"He behaved cruelly to your sister. It was a shock to me to find him master of Alandyke. I had expected to see my old friend's grandchild reigning there. I had brought pearls and silks and rare lace for her from the East. Well, I can present them now to Lady Carruthers."

Bee looked so amazed that the General explained.

"She doesn't exist yet, but she will soon. We will have a short engagement, Bee. You must be Countess of Carruthers in a month."

Bee gasped, then her face grew pale.

"What's the matter, dear?"

"I forgot. I mustn't marry you. There is mamma. She and Mr. D'Arcy are worry enough to me. What would they be to you?"

"I can stand it," returned the General, quietly; "so that they leave you in peace. Your poor mother has made a sad mistake, I expect."

"Yes."

"And you don't remember your own father?"

"He was very different. Nell used to say he was all that was good and noble. She told me once he was forsaken by all his own relations because he married my mother. He came from Yorkshire. Nell was so pleased to go to Alandyke, because it was her father's country."

A strange suspicion came to Lord Carruthers. He remembered how Nell had told him her father's motto; he remembered the last conversation he ever had with Sir Kenneth Leigh, and he felt pretty certain that Bee was the child of his favourite Harold.

But he said nothing. If it was so, if, as he firmly believed, Beatrice and her sister had a right to the name of Leigh, then he was convinced they had also a right to Alandyke, but while all was mere conjecture he would keep his suspicions from Sir Jocelyn. After all, the Baronet might as well enjoy his possessions. As Countess Carruthers little Bee would need nothing at his hands, and Nell—well, it seemed too probable that Nell had gone to the silent land where wealth and rank could not follow her.

Pretty Mrs. Yorke found her husband standing by the open window.

"What a time you've been, Belle."

"I!" said Mrs. Belle, indignantly, "why, it's you who've been long; it's a whole hour since we came in from dinner."

"And you never felt anxious about me before. Lord Carruthers had a better opinion of your wifely affection."

"Harold, what do you mean?"

He put his arm round her fondly, as though he meant the caress to atone for the teasing.

"The General's a deep plotter, Belle; he wanted to have a *little-à-tête* with Miss Stuart, and he implored me to stay here because he thought your anxiety would certainly bring you to inquire about my welfare, and he would then have his desired opportunity."

"But what does he want?"

"I believe he wishes to ask her a question!"

Belle never guessed what sort of question. She stood there leaning on her husband's arm, and the minutes crept on until the clock chimed ten; then she started as from a dream. "Oh! Harold, I've been here nearly an hour. What will Beatrice think, our last evening and all too!"

"I think she will forgive you," returned Harold, quietly; "you'd better go and ask her. I should say the General's *little-à-tête* was over by this time."

Isabel took his advice; she found Bee on the music stool just as she had left her. Lord Carruthers had his pocket-book in his hand; he was taking down the exact address of her mother and Mr. D'Arcy.

"I'm sorry I've been so long," said Mrs.

Yorke, sweetly. "Bee, what are you doing? Have you been giving the Earl valuable information that he's taking it down so carefully?"

"She has given me something better than information," said Lord Carruthers, with his courtly grace. "She has promised in a few weeks' time she will give me herself."

Belle started.

"Herself!"

"Aye!" seeing her mystification, and rather enjoying it. "When you come back to town I shall have to introduce her to you under a new name. Beatrice Stuart will have passed away to make room for the Countess Carruthers."

CHAPTER XVI.

In the quiet of that sweet August evening Helena Stuart crept back to the stately home she had left so strangely. She had lived at Alandyke not quite three months. Already she had been away from it almost double the time of her sojourn there, and yet, as she turned aside from the shrubbery to the door leading to the private staircase, it seemed to Nell that she was going home.

She never thought of what reception awaited her; the idea that scorn and contempt might be her portion never occurred to her. She knew that Sir Jocelyn and his sister-in-law were away; the nurse was now the paramount authority at Alandyke, and with her she had ever been a favourite. No fear that she would refuse to let her see the sick child who moaned to see her.

Up the stairs she went slowly, and yet with a light, springing step, down the long passages till she came to the nursery door. She opened it noiselessly and crept in. Already the shadow of coming trouble rested on the willow cheerful room. Mab had been hastily removed at first thought of her sister's danger. Adela's white bed stood alone in the spot where the twin cubs had been. The nurse sat in a low chair near it; a table full of all the paraphernalia attendant on illness was at the foot of the bed, and by it stood an elderly man—no other than the medical celebrity of the district—who had been summoned in hot haste from Wharton.

As in a dream afterwards Nell remembered to have noticed all this at the time. She saw but one face—the white, pinched, childish face she had known so rosy and joyous, which lay so wearily on the pillows, the dark eyes open as though waiting, as though expecting someone.

"I want father!" Nell heard the little voice say, plaintively. "Why doesn't he come? I want him badly."

"He will come, dear," said the nurse, bending over her. "He will come soon."

"I want him now," said Adela, sadly. "He'd bring dear Miss Stuart!" the dark eyes turned to the doctor. "He said we should never see her again. But don't you think he'd send her now I am so ill?"

The doctor turned to the nurse irritably enough.

"Why haven't you sent for the young lady? Don't you see it might save the child's life? No father in the world would deny a child's wish when she was so ill as this!"

"I'd send directly, doctor, if I could," replied the nurse, meekly; "but no one knows where Miss Stuart is. There's many say she's dead, I believe the master thinks so himself."

There was a movement. A little figure stood at nurse's side—a little creature in a plain black dress (she had taken off the scarlet shawl before she entered the sick room), her soft brown hair curling in short rings on her forehead.

"I have come back," she said, simply. "You will let me stay with Adela, won't you, nurse? I don't think Sir Jocelyn would mind. I can go away directly she is better."

But before the nurse could answer, the question seemed settled. At first sound of that well-remembered voice a change passed over the face of the little patient. She put out her arm, and as Nell went forward and gathered the child to her heart those who stood by knew that had they wished it ever so the



"HEATRICH! I WANT TO ASK YOU A QUESTION!" SAID THE GENERAL.

commonest humanity would prevent their parting the girl and the little child who clung to her in such boundless love. Five minutes more and the dark eyes closed peacefully—the refreshing sleep the doctor had almost despaired of had come at last.

He looked at the nurse, and she followed him into the outer room. There was a strange mistiness about her eyes.

"Who is that young lady?"

"Miss Stuart, sir. She was governess here in the spring. The master took a dislike to her and she disappeared."

"Disappeared?"

"Aye, sir! I was the last person who saw her. I met her on the stairs one evening in March, and she told me she was going to get some air in the garden. From that night to this I have never seen her."

"She has been ill, probably. She looks very delicate."

"Yes, sir; now you mention it I can see she's altered. She's thinner, and her beautiful hair has been cut short."

"You have heard from Lady Daryl?"

"My lady is not coming, sir. She says she is not used to illness, and could do no good. We telegraphed to the master; I think the house-keeper sent it off two days ago. I know we calculated he might be here to-night. But, there, if he's too late, he'd better not have come. Miss Adela is just the light of his eyes."

"I don't think he will be too late. This sleep may do wonders. If the child rallies Miss Stuart will have saved her life."

Nurse hesitated.

"And you don't think the master 'll be hard on me, sir, for disobeying him?"

"Disobeying him?"

"Before she left Alandyke he told me Miss Stuart was not to see the children again. The master's a hard man, sir. He sent away the old nurse, who had brought up Lady Alberta from a baby, just because she crossed his rules. He's never let poor Goody cross the threshold since.

And she loved the little ladies dearly, for their mother's sake."

"I will take all blame!" said the doctor, shortly. "He must have strange ideas to object to Miss Stuart. She looks little more than a child herself."

"They went back to the nursery, but the little invalid still slept peacefully."

"You will be cramped to death," said Dr. Gates, to Nell; "and yet if you leave her she may wake, and this sleep is her only chance."

"I will stay," she answered, in a sweet, low voice.

The doctor fetched an elder-down quilt of some vivid scarlet hue and spread it over the two. He placed a chair so as to support Nell's tired feet. And then he looked at them; and albeit a man little given to such fancies, thought what a picture they would have made for an artist—the two faces on the one pillow, so alike in their delicate beauty, so great a contrast in all else. Adela's long, dark hair fell over Nell's shoulder, hiding her black dress; indeed, all of the little governess which the bright quilts left visible was her gentle face and small lily-white hand.

"You had better not go in again," he said to nurse. "It only risks waking the child. Miss Stuart can call you if she rouses. For my part I should advise you to go to bed. You've been up two nights, and must need rest."

It was past two. The doctor had announced his intention of remaining till morning; so nurse thought she might venture on obeying his advice. And she went off to lay down by Mab, whose flushed, rosy cheeks and regular breathing contrasted so greatly with her sister's.

Barely half an hour, and a hushed sound was heard through that anxious household. Dr. Gates distinguished the noise of wheels, the opening of the grand entrance. He knew by instinct that Sir Jocelyn had arrived, and he went downstairs to meet him. They were old acquaintances, for Dr. Gates had attended Lady Alberta in her last illness. It struck him, as he looked at the

Baronet's stern-set face, that his child's danger moved him more heavily even than her mother's loss.

"I suppose it is over!" said Sir Jocelyn. "I am too late, and you have come to break it to me."

"I should not have hurried to bring you such news," replied the physician, cheerfully. "There is a change for the better this evening. Your child is asleep, and this sleep may be the saving of her life."

"Are you sure it is not the sleep of death?"

"I am positive."

Sir Jocelyn sank into a chair.

"I have travelled night and day since the news reached me. I thought she was doomed—that the curse of those who despoil the father-
less had fallen on her."

"My dear sir," inexpressibly shocked, "what can you be thinking of? Your child's danger has set you dreaming."

Sir Jocelyn shook his head.

"It is quite true," he said, slowly. "For five weary years I have feared the curse, and I always knew it would fall on Adela, since she was my elder child—the heiress of Alandyke as they called her in mockery."

(To be continued.)

In the matter of personal cleanliness, the Filipino is equalled only by the Japanese. Men, women and children seem to take pride in being clean; yet their houses are untidily kept, and they make not even the simplest kinds of sanitary arrangements.

One of the most beautiful natural rock carvings in the world is the Southern Cross, on the island of Grand Manan, in the Bay of Fundy. It stands at the head of a ledge of rocks jutting into the bay from the foot of one of the immense cliffs at the southern end of the Grand Manan. Its shape is that of an almost perfect cross.



LADY HYACINTH LAY STRETCHED ON THE FLOOR, A PAPER CLENCHED IN HER HAND.

CAN YOU BLAME HER?

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CHAPTER III.

SIR JOHN CARLYLE reported the result of his wooing very briefly to the Earl of Norman.

"You were right," he said, simply. "Lady Hyacinth is nothing but a child. I am going abroad for six months. When I return to England I shall come here again and ask her once more to be my wife."

The peer looked troubled.

"There is not the slightest reason why you should not be formally engaged at once."

"Yes," said Carlyle, quietly, "there is an all-powerful one. I want your daughter for my wife; but I will not have her as your gift. She shall come to me freely. I have no fear of the result. Lady Hyacinth's heart will turn to me more readily while I am away."

"And Normanhurst?"

"Normanhurst is yours for life if Hyacinth becomes my wife; if not—but there, I do not care to think of failure."

Lord Norman decided promptly he should not fail. If his possession of Normanhurst depended upon Sir John becoming his son-in-law the baronet should enjoy that relationship, no matter what threat or coercion had to be used to the poor girl, upon the disposal of whose slender hand so much depended.

Left alone, Lord Norman went in search of his wife, to whom he confided Sir John's visit and its cause.

The Countess threw up her hands.

"It is the best news I have heard for ages. Of course Hyacinth ought to be mistress of Normanhurst some day, and her marrying Sir John will not only secure your comfort, but her own birth-right."

"I suppose she will marry him, Helena!"

"Of course."

"I confess I should have been better pleased had they been formally engaged."

"Hyacinth does not know another marriageable man. I shall take care to spread the news far and wide that she is betrothed; that will keep off all future pretendants."

"But if she refuses Sir John?"

"I shall not allow such folly."

"Girls are stubborn things."

An expression of savage determination crossed my lady's face.

"I never fall when I make up my mind. Your daughter shall be Lady Carlyle; I promise it you."

She left him and went in search of Hyacinth. The two saw very little of each other. There was a tacit, mutual antagonism between them.

The Countess found her stepdaughter in the study, and before the startled girl understood her intention she had caught her in her arms and was kissing her French fashion on either cheek.

"My dear, I am delighted; you will be the richest lady in the county. The Elms will have a lovely mistress, and I shall begin at once to select a trousseau worthy Sir John's bride!"

Poor Hyacinth.

"You don't understand," said the girl, faintly; "I told Sir John it could never be."

"What could never be?"

"I told him that I could never be his wife."

"Then, my dear, you were more foolish than I thought for. Sir John is a charming young man, and his fortune enormous—he might marry a duke's daughter."

"I am sure I wish he could."

The stepmother looked at her sharply.

"Hyacinth! we had better understand each other. You will marry Sir John, even if I have to drag you to the altar."

"I am sure he would not wish an unwilling wife."

"Why need you be unwilling?"

"I don't want to marry anyone."

"Nonsense! I suppose you want to be a bar-

den on our small means all your life," quite forgetting that while Hyacinth was single the Earl enjoyed the use of her marriage portion.

"I don't want to trouble you; I only want to stay as I am. Oh! Lady Norman, please give up the idea of my marrying Sir John. Indeed, indeed, it can never be."

"It will be—must be—shall be."

"But I—"

"Do you know all that depends upon it, foolish, ungrateful girl! Sir John Carlyle is the true owner of Normanhurst. It is in his power to take possession of it at any minute, and drive us from our home."

"I will beg him to be merciful; I will implore him on my bended knees to leave the old place to my father—but I cannot marry him."

Lady Norman's cold, cruel eyes looked intently at the girl's face. Then she asked quickly,—

"Is there anyone else?"

Mute silence.

"Is there anyone else? Are you refusing Sir John because you fancy yourself in love with anyone else?"

"There is no one in the whole world whom I wish to marry."

"Very well! Then you can get over your foolish scruples. Remember, Hyacinth, resistance is useless."

Left alone Hyacinth put one hand to her aching heart, and tried to think; but thought was well nigh madness. Whichever way she looked her future seemed one sea of troubles.

"I must run away."

But where? She had never been away from Normanhurst in her life but for one brief week. What was she to do? Where was she to go?

Hyacinth crept upstairs to her own room, and sitting down to her shabby little desk, wrote a touching, piteous letter, which might have melted a heart of stone.

"Oh, my darling! my darling!" pleaded the poor girl, "come back to me. I am all alone in the world, and the weight of our secret is more

than I can bear. Oh! come back, my love! come back!"

She signed it with a single initial; then putting on her things prepared to carry it to the post. There was no post-office for five miles. A letter-carrier collected the correspondence of the family daily; but Hyacinth never thought of entrusting her letter to him. She was fastening the buttons of her jacket when Miss Johnson came in.

"My dear Hyacinth, you are never going out!"

"I must."

"Look at the weather; with your cold and cough, it is simply madness."

"I must go."

The simple, kindly old maid looked entreatingly at the girl, but Hyacinth's face was pale and set; then, to her pupil's surprise, for the first time in their acquaintance Miss Johnson flung her arms round Hyacinth's neck and said, with a little sob,—

"Do you know you are risking your health, your very life, Hyacinth!"

The bold eyes turned to her with a mute appeal.

"I cannot help it."

"You were caught in a snowstorm on the last of these expeditions. You are still suffering from the illness you brought on then."

"I think I should be glad if I could die," said the poor girl, faintly. "Oh, Miss Johnson, my troubles seem harder than I can bear."

The old governess showed herself in a new light this morning. The prim formality of manner vanished; it was as a loving friend, not as a rigid instructress, she spoke to her pupil.

"Is it any new trouble, Hyacinth?"

"It is not very new."

"My dear child, you are not grieving over your stepmother's unkindness, surely?"

"Oh, no."

"My lady is angry with you to-day. She has just been to me and ordered that you never go out alone. Have you had any fresh quarrel with her, Hyacinth?"

"Yes. They want me to marry Sir John Carlyle."

"And you object?"

"I cannot do it." Here her voice broke into a sob. "Oh, Miss Johnson, I can't explain. I can't say any more—only I cannot be Sir John's wife."

There was a pause. The poor old maid's thoughts went back to a turned-down page in her own youth. Her eyes were not quite dry as she turned to Hyacinth.

"You mean there is someone whose affection you prize more than Sir John's wealth?"

Hyacinth bowed her head.

"And these mysterious expeditions are to meet him?"

"Oh, no; I have not seen him for months. Miss Johnson, my heart feels well-nigh broken."

"Do you mean he is false to you?"

"He loves me as his own life, only—"

She buried her face on Miss Johnson's bosom, and sobbed out four words.

The old governess stroked the girl's pretty hair with a very tender touch. As yet she knew only a quarter of the truth, but it was enough to make her very gentle with poor, wifely Hyacinth.

"He will come back," she said, hopefully; "and you say yourself you have six months' respite; a great deal may happen in that time."

But poor Hyacinth did not derive much comfort from these words. She had kept back two facts from her governess, and she had not told her that long before Sir John returned for his answer her parents would probably have cast her forth for ever.

"And you will not go?" urged Miss Johnson, as Hyacinth turned round to put on her hat.

"I must. Oh! Miss Johnson, don't you understand the suspense is killing me!"

"You must not go! You cannot see yourself what a tired little creature you look. Hyacinth, I have a horror of anything deceitful and underhanded, but rather than you should go out to-day I will do your errand myself."

The girl's trembling cheeks, her weak,

faltering steps, forbade her refusing the kind offer.

"You will not betray me?"

"I never betrayed anyone in my life—never!"

"I trust you."

She gave her a few directions, and then she looked up into Miss Johnson's face with a tearful smile.

"There is mercy in Heaven, after all. Do you know when you came in all looked to me one black despair, and now I see a ray of hope!"

Miss Johnson looked very grave when she left Hyacinth. She did not know the extent of the girl's difficulties, but she had heard enough to tell a stormy period lay before the inmates of Normanhurst. On the stairs she met the Countess.

"I have persuaded Hyacinth to lie down, my lady," she said, gravely. "She has quite worn herself out with crying, so I am going to the village for those things you wished us to buy, and I hope she will have a nice rest!"

Lady Norman was graciousness itself. She told Miss Johnson not to hurry; she meant to drive herself that afternoon, and should take Lady Hyacinth with her.

Poor Miss Johnson! she positively hated walking, and Hyacinth's errand caused her many weary steps; but she plodded bravely on to the humble little shop where Hyacinth had stood that winter's afternoon not long ago.

She asked the same question, but with none of the passionate heartache which had filled poor Hyacinth's mind as it trembled on her lips.

Apparently Miss Johnson was to be more fortunate than her pupil, for she received what she demanded, and putting it into her pocket, she turned homeward.

Hyacinth was waiting for her with flushed cheeks and two bright eyes. She turned to her governess with plaintive voice,—

"Oh! tell me—tell me quickly!"

Miss Johnson placed what she had received from the old shopwoman in Hyacinth's lap. She just heard one cry of rapture which escaped the girl, and then she went to her own room, leaving Hyacinth with rare delicacy alone.

She told the Countess her pupil was still in her own room when that lady sailed into the study to make inquiries. Lady Norman shrugged her shoulders.

"Sailing, like the spoiled child she is!" she said, scornfully. "Miss Johnson, I am going up to London this afternoon with Lord Norman. I have changed my mind respecting Lady Hyacinth's debut. As the affianced wife of Sir John Carlyle, it is not desirable that she should appear in society until the engagement can be announced."

Miss Johnson bowed. It was at least a relief for Hyacinth, if only the girl did not fret her heart away in the dreary loneliness of Normanhurst.

"I wish you to keep a strict surveillance over your pupil," went on the Countess, haughtily. "There is a probability we shall not return to Kent until Parliament is dissolved. Lady Hyacinth will remain under your care. I particularly wish her to be as dull as possible; she is to have no amusements, no recreations. Her food is to be of the plainest; her clothes the commonest. I will let her see the kind of life she has to expect if she wilfully throws away her splendid prospects!"

"I think I understand,"—slowly. "Lady Hyacinth is to lead an existence so dreary and monotonous that she would be ready to welcome any escape from it!"

"Precisely. I see you understand us, Miss Johnson. We shall not trouble to say farewell to Hyacinth; you can tell her our determination."

Miss Johnson bowed the Countess out of the study, her heart full of fierce indignation. The old maid had taken Lord and Lady Norman's indifference of Hyacinth very tranquilly until to-day, but now a new spirit stirred in her.

Hyacinth's white, weary face had awoke her real affection, and she would have thoroughly enjoyed a verbal fight with the Countess.

She waited until the carriage had driven to the

station—she guessed the sudden journey to London was the Earl's doing, but she meant to make the best of things to Hyacinth. It was only when the carriage had taken the master and mistress of Normanhurst away that she resolved to go and arouse her pupil.

"Two hours is surely enough for her to enjoy that!" with an emphasis on the last word. "Besides, the poor child has had nothing since breakfast; she must be quite sinking for want of food!"

She knocked at Hyacinth's door; no answer came. She waited a moment, and then walked in. The sight that met her almost unnerved her. Lady Hyacinth lay stretched on the floor, white and motionless, a folded paper clasped in her clenched hand.

Miss Johnson called on her by every endearing name, but of no avail—no answer came. She bent down and touched her hands, they were cold as ice; the eyes were closed, and their long, black lashes rested on her perfectly colourless skin in a statuesque beauty which would have charmed an artist.

But Miss Johnson was not an artist; and the awful stillness of Hyacinth's features alarmed her.

She never thought of ringing for assistance. She felt certain the swoon was caused by the paper held in the girl's hand, and that paper must have reference to her secret.

Miss Johnson locked the door, and put the key in her pocket, then she came back to Hyacinth's side, and with tender force removed the fatal paper.

The poor old maid had no notion of being dishonourable, but if she was to help her lawless charge, she must know the contents of that letter. She read the first three lines, and an expression of awful fear crossed her face.

"Heaven help her, poor child!—Heaven help her! Her heart must be well-nigh broken!"

It seemed cruel to recall her to consciousness; but Miss Johnson persevered. In half-an-hour Hyacinth opened her eyes, and found herself lying on her own white bed.

"Do not be alarmed," said the governess. "The Earl and Countess have left for London. No one knows of your illness but myself."

Hyacinth turned her eyes on Miss Johnson with a dumb entreaty in their wild depths.

"Is it true?"

The governess sighed. Gladly would she have spared the girl the pain, but the blow must fall some time; it would be false kindness to delay it.

"My poor child, yes. Your lover will never come back to claim your promise. Take courage, Hyacinth; he was true to you till the last. He died a death you may well be proud of—fighting for his queen and country."

"And he has left me. I am all alone."

To poor Miss Johnson's ideas the young man had really, by his death, removed the worst of Hyacinth's difficulties. It would have been impossible, perhaps, to give up a living lover, but the memory of a far-off grave need not stand between the girl and the brilliant destiny which had been offered her.

"My dear, you must try to bear it. A fearful trial would have awaited you on his return—now the struggle is ended. In three months of seclusion you can mourn your lost love, and then—"

Hyacinth glanced round the room. To Miss Johnson's alarm there was no more grief—no utter subjection by sorrow in that glance. It seemed—rather a desperate searching after possibilities—a striving to escape from some threatening calamity.

"My dear," she whispered to her pupil, "my dear Hyacinth, what is it?"

"Shut the door."

"It is locked, dear; I fastened it when I came up. I feared the servants might come up and find you fainting."

Hyacinth took the old maid's two hands and held them in her thin ones so tightly that Miss Johnson could have cried with pain.

"Will you be true to me?"

"I will be as true to you as your own mother could be were she alive."

"And you will save me!"

"Hyacinth, how can I convince you! I may not have been very sympathetic to you before, but, dear, long ago—when I was young—I, too, had a lover and sweetheart—by his memory I will be true to you!"

Hyacinth put her thin white arm round the spinster's neck and drew her head down until her ear was close to the girl's own mouth, then she whispered a few hurried words. Miss Johnson started back, and threw up her hands in despair.

"My dear, my dear, you must be mistaken!"

Hyacinth shook her head.

"I have feared it for weeks, I am certain of it now. Now you know why, even though my love is dead, I can never be Sir John Carlyle's wife!"

Miss Johnson was silent from sheer dismay.

"If only I could die!" moaned Hyacinth, "if only I could go to him and be at rest!"

"You mustn't talk so—you mustn't really. Fancy, and you not eighteen!"

"What am I to do?"

The governess could not tell her. The one ray of comfort in their position was that Lord and Lady Norman were away. One thing was certain—Hyacinth must not meet them until—until the time came for her to give her answer to Sir John Carlyle.

Lord and Lady Norman spent a very pleasant season in London. The pair were not disposed to fret because they had left a disobedient child at home.

They quite believed that lonely captivity would break Hyacinth's spirit, and already, in fancy, saw her the wife of Sir John Carlyle, and Normanhurst the Earl's in all safety for his life.

It was February when they went to London, and the Baronet was the first person they encountered.

"I am just setting out on my tour," Sir John told them with a strange air of constraint. "Has Lady Hyacinth accompanied you to London?"

"No; Hyacinth has not been strong lately, and we have resolved to put off her presentation until next year. Perhaps," and the Countess smiled, "it will then be Lady Hyacinth Carlyle who courts to Her Majesty."

Sir John reddened. The man's whole heart was in the matter. He had scoffed at love and marriage; had flirted right and left; had openly proclaimed his low opinion of womanhood; yet he loved Hyacinth with a passion as pure as it was tender. He believed her innocent as a child, spotless as an angel.

"You think then I shall be successful?"

"I am sure of it. Directly you return to England you must come to Normanhurst—unless, indeed, you have changed your wishes."

"They will last my life!"

And then the young man took his leave; and of the few who loved Hyacinth one was absent from England.

News from Normanhurst came pretty regularly. Miss Johnson had been ordered to write once a fortnight, and the letters were simple reports of Lady Hyacinth's welfare.

The first were cheerful enough, but as the spring advanced a strain of anxiety marked the spinster's accounts.

She was quite sure Lady Hyacinth needed a change. She was pale and languid; sea breezes would be beneficial.

Lady Norman wrote back promptly her step-daughter should have sea breezes in plenty when once she had consented to become the bride of Sir John Carlyle.

A long stop ensued in the correspondence here; then Miss Johnson wrote again. In her opinion the worst thing for Sir John's success was to bring his name too much before Hyacinth.

The girl herself did not desire change. She clung to Normanhurst with pertinacious affection, but she grew weaker every day. A low fever had broken out in Red Cross, and if, in her present state, her pupil caught it, she would not answer for the consequences.

The Earl and Countess were fairly alarmed.

Then a letter went to Normanhurst by return of post, for Hyacinth's death would as effectually prevent their hopes as her obstinacy, so Lady Norman wrote that all things considered, Miss Johnson had better take her charge away for three months to any seaside place the doctor recommended—only she stipulated two things: Lady Hyacinth was to make no acquaintances whatever, and their expenses were to be very small. Thirty pounds must suffice for the three months.

Miss Johnson exclaimed,—

"Why, my lady spends more on a ball-dress!"

"Never mind," cried Hyacinth, who had been reading the letter with burning cheeks; "I have some money. Miss Johnson, this letter seems to me almost new life. How everything is arranging itself for me—and I owe it all to you! I tremble to think what would have become of me without you!"

"Then, don't think, my dear"; but the old maid's voice trembled. "I promised you on that dull February day to do my best for you. Someday I shall see you a happy, honoured wife, and then I shall be more than repaid for my efforts, even if I am teaching little children until I am seventy."

"When shall we go?"

"We must ask the Doctor. No," as her pupil blushed crimson, "I shall not ask him to call here; I will waylay him going out of church tomorrow."

For the Lady Hyacinth had ceased to attend Divine service; she had ceased to walk at all, except a turn occasionally in the grounds; and of the few servants left at Normanhurst to attend on her and the governess the only one who ever saw the fair young daughter of the house was a taciturn housemaid, so surly that she never gossiped, and so stupid that she never made any observation, even to herself.

Dr. Bell, a fussy old man, who had attended the Dances for three generations, was not surprised at Miss Johnson's request.

"Poor girl!" speaking of Lady Hyacinth, "it is months since she has been outside those gates! No wonder she needs change! Shall I just run up and see her before I advise you?"

"I think not, doctor. The last thing we want is to alarm the poor child. You know her constitution thoroughly, so you will be able to tell."

"Yorkshire is the place for her," said Dr. Bell, promptly, "and the farther north you go the better."

It was a decision after Miss Johnson's own heart, for she was Yorkshire born and bred. She went home with a beaming face.

"We will start to-morrow, Lady Hyacinth."

Affectionate parents would surely propose to meet their child in London and exchange a few words with her before her journey in quest of health.

Lord and Lady Norman were not affectionate, but they might make the proposal for form's sake; so Miss Johnson hurried the preparations, and four-and-twenty hours after Dr. Bell's advice had been given Hyacinth was lying on the sofa of a little parlour whose window looked out upon the foaming waves of the great North Sea.

"This will do beautifully," said Miss Johnson, approvingly. "We'll subscribe to the library at Whitby, and I'll go in twice-a-week for our letters, which, of course, must be sent there. This little village will be the making of you, Hyacinth."

A dozen houses on the beach, a few more standing further back, a shop or two—that was the whole population of Sand's End, a tiny fishing village, a pleasant walk from beautiful Whitby.

And there Hyacinth stayed for the three months which yet remained before Sir John came for his answer.

Miss Johnson was an affectionate companion, and took almost a mother's care of her young charge.

They never went to any of the fashionable resorts near, never even wandered to the pleasant Cliff Gardens at Whitby where the visitors throng in the season; they kept themselves to themselves, and obeyed Lady Norman's injunctions to the letter.

"Hyacinth, I have heard from the Countess." It was the last week in August. Hyacinth, leaning on her pillow, looked up inquiringly.

It was a very changed Hyacinth from the one Sir John had begged to be his wife. To look at her you could see she had needed the change to Sand's End; even now she was too thin and fragile for perfect health, though the bloom was returning slowly to her cheek and the brightness to her eye; but the change went deeper than this.

Hyacinth had need to appear almost a child. Her face had the wistful expression one often sees on a child's.

That was altered now. The girl who sat opposite Miss Johnson was a woman, with all a woman's loveliness.

Six months had wonderfully developed her beauty. She looked two or three years older than when Sir John Carlyle parted from her, and six times lovelier.

"Must it be?"

It was a strange appeal. She looked at her old governess with gratitude shining in her eyes, but yet with a pleading pathos in her voice.

"Must it be?"

"There is no help for it," and here Miss Johnson wiped her eyes with her pocket-handkerchief. "Hyacinth, I have thought until my brain ached, I have laid awake at night, scheming and planning how to save you, this pang, and I see no remedy."

Hyacinth shook her old friend's hand fondly.

"It is a bitter trial!"

"But one of the must-be's! Hyacinth, Lady Norman wishes us to return to Normanhurst on Monday. Sir John is expected on the first."

"Wednesday."

"Yes."

"Perhaps he has changed his mind. He has been abroad, I believe. Surely he has seen beautiful faces there to drive mine out of his head."

Miss Johnson thought privately it would be difficult to find in all the world a face beautiful enough to compare with Hyacinth's. She only said, simply,—

"My dear girl, if you could only make up your mind to it, it would be the best thing in the world for you to become Sir John's wife."

Hyacinth burst into tears.

"The meanest cottager is allowed to mourn her dead a year. It is barely seven months since my darling left me, and must I already think of another love?"

"It would be best, indeed it would—best for yourself and— Here she paused, and ended rather tamely, "everyone."

"I know you mean kindly," said Hyacinth, gently. "You must not think me ungrateful. I will think yet."

"Think of the reverse side," pleaded the old maid. "If you incur the anger of Lord and Lady Norman, if you are shut up, as it were, a state prisoner at Normanhurst, think what your life will be! Think of the bitter heartache, the yearning longing which will be yours!"

She was too wise to say more than. She left her words to sink deep into Hyacinth's heart, and went out to enjoy the pleasant August sunshine.

Left alone, Hyacinth took up her work and tried to go on with it as though nothing had happened, but the tears fell thick and fast. She was obliged at last to put it down, her tears had almost blinded her. The pretty trifle lay disregarded in her lap; it was no costly embroidery, no wonderful specimen of art needlework, nothing in the world but what might have been found in any cottage throughout England.

Lady Hyacinth had been making a baby's shoe.

Nothing more was said between Miss Johnson and her pupil regarding Hyacinth's lover, only when the carriage came to take them to the station early on Monday morning, Hyacinth leant back in the corner as though to shut out the beauty of the summer sunshine, and murmured, brokenly,—

"It is like losing him over again."

It was quite late when they reached Normanhurst, almost nine o'clock. The Earl and Countess were standing in the hall waiting to receive them. For the first time in her life

Hyacinth felt their fond kisses upon her brow and lips.

"Welcome home, my daughter!"

"Welcome home, Hyacinth, my dear; see breezes must be wonderful beautifiers. Do you know that you are looking positively lovely!"

Hyacinth blushed rosy red.

"I suppose I have grown up," she said, simply. "I know I feel years older than when I went away."

"No fear," said the Countess to her husband, when they were left alone; "no fear of Sir John's wishing to draw back. I never saw anyone so marvellously improved. Why she will be the belle of next season!"

And the lady spoke a few words of unqualified approval to Miss Johnson for the way in which she had carried out her instructions; then she added, in a low tone,—

"You have been much with Lady Hyacinth. Do you think her feelings have changed at all towards Sir John Carlyle?"

"I think she will marry him, my lady," said Miss Johnson, who preferred to leave the question about Hyacinth's feelings unanswered.

"I knew we should succeed."

"I hope he will be kind to her," said the old maid, with a tear in her eye. "Lady Hyacinth is a fragile creature, and needs tender cherishing."

"She will have it as Sir John's wife; he positively adores her, Miss Johnson."

"Indeed!"

Wednesday morning brought a letter to the Earl from his destined son-in-law; there was an enclosure for Hyacinth, which her father handed her with the seal unbroken.

It was very short and simple—Sir John was not the sort of man to pour out his soul on paper.

"I am coming to-morrow for your answer. As I told you my feelings are unchanged, I can only hope you have kept your promise and thought carefully of my wishes."

Dinner was postponed till eight to do honour to the Baronet.

Lady Norman showed unusual interest in her stepdaughter's toilet.

"For goodness sake, Hyacinth, don't wear black; you are never to be seen in anything else. One would think you were in mourning."

Hyacinth blushed.

"Haven't you dresses, dearest?" demanded my lady, who quite forgot it was her own province to procure them.

"I have a white muslin; shall I wear that, Lady Norman?"

"Yes. At any rate, it will be better than this eternal black."

The muslin had belonged to Hyacinth's own mother. It was of the finest possible texture and trimmed with rare old lace; it was hardly in the fashion of the day, but Hyacinth never thought of that.

When she came down dressed for dinner, Lady Norman almost started. Never, thought she, had there been such a lovely vision!

The soft, filmy muslin showed the outline of Hyacinth's perfect figure, and then fell round her in a soft, floating train; it was looped here and there with forget-me-nots. Forget-me-nots were twined in the chestnut hair, while one string of rare pearls encircled the white, swan-like throat.

No one had told Hyacinth the alteration in the dinner-hour. She came down a little before seven, and the Countess saw her installed in a low chair by the open window before she went to her own room.

On her way she met Sir John, and welcomed him right warmly.

"We thought you would like to see Hyacinth alone; she is in the drawing-room. I will take care you are not disturbed."

"And my answer?"

She smiled.

"I must refer you to Hyacinth; she has spent the last three months in Yorkshire, and she only returned on Monday evening."

Sir John turned the handle of the drawing-room door. His hand positively shook as he did

so; he who used to boast of his self-possession and indifference actually trembled as he prepared to enter the presence of the one woman who had power to touch his heart.

"Hyacinth!"

She turned and saw him; the memory of their last meeting and all she had suffered since almost overpowered her. A lovely blush dyed her face as Sir John came forward and took her hand.

"Hyacinth, won't you speak to me, my darling! Have you no word of welcome for one who loves you more than life?"

"You were always kind to me," she murmured. "I am glad to see you again."

"Kind to you, who would not be!"

"You saved my life," she said, shyly. "I have often thought since it was very ungrateful of me not to thank you, but I was so ill and unhappy."

"I know,"—a long pause. "Hyacinth, do you know why I have come here?"

Her eyes drooped beneath his earnest gaze; he took her two hands in his.

"I told you before I went away, Hyacinth, that I loved you as my life. I asked you to think of this, and try to smile upon my suit."

"I know."

"Have you thought of it?"

"Yes."

"And your answer?"

Poor Hyacinth! up to the eleventh hour she had hoped against hope the Baronet would not come, or at least that something would have changed his wishes, and now he stood here asking for her answer, and she had none ready—none.

"My darling, I am waiting."

Hyacinth took courage.

"You know I do not love you," she began, hesitatingly, picking one of her forget-me-nots nervously to pieces as she spoke.

"You have not seen enough of me to love me," he answered, slowly; "but I love you so well I am sure I could teach you the lesson. I know in time I should win my wife's heart."

You might have heard a pin fall, so complete was the silence.

Hyacinth could not bring herself to speak; he would not seem to hurry her.

"You are sure you understand," she said, tremblingly. "I do not want you to be deceived. I want you to know I do not love you, that I think I shall go my whole life through without loving anyone."

He pressed the hand he held more closely.

"Is there anyone in the world, Hyacinth, you prefer to me? Do you love another? Are you so reluctant to consent to marry me because you have seen someone else whose wife you fain would be?"

She turned to him with a bitter sob.

"Sir John, there is no one in the whole world I wish to marry, no one. If I seem to hesitate it is that it seems to me ungenerous to take advantage of your love. You offer me your whole heart, your name, your fortune, and what have I to give you in exchange?—nothing, nothing!"

"You have yourself," answered the man, fondly; "the only treasure in the whole world I covet. Hyacinth, my darling, let your generous scruples perish. Remember I am not a boy to change with every wind that blows. You are my first love, you will be my last. Put your hand in mine and promise to be my wife!"

And there, in the sweet September gloaming, she put her hand in his, and murmured the words he wished to hear. There was no joy at her heart, no love-light in her beautiful eyes, as she stood at Sir John's side and promised to be his wife.

She had done her best; had told him she had no love to give him; he had perished, he was willing to take the risk. And so, sorely pressed on all sides, troubled by doubts and fears, unable to see any escape from her parents' anger if she refused him, she yielded to Sir John's entreaties, and pledged her troth to him.

Reader, can you blame her?

(To be continued.)

THE HEIRESS OF BEAUDESERT.

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CHAPTER XLVII.—(continued.)

"You are certain that you could make her love you?" she asked, doubtfully.

"She must love me now, or I should have no power over her."

He knew that this was not true, but he thought it the most convincing argument that he could find. In this he was not mistaken, for Flore was glad to catch at the merest straw to save her conscience.

"True! They say you fascinated her on the night of the ball; they say she receives letters from you constantly; in fact, she went on in such a way that the paragraph in *Veracity* nearly cost her her character!"

All this was news to him; but he listened eagerly. So their names had been linked together by scandalous tongues, and he was probably the only man in the county who had not heard of it.

"But Miss Springgold, who told you of these stolen meetings? I thought they were a private matter between Lady Valerie and myself; I would have died rather than mention them."

"Then the scandal was true!" a light coming into her eyes.

If Valerie had really kept these assignations she was not worthy of Rex Verreker.

Colonel Darrell was silent; he had not lost all the instincts of a gentleman, and nothing was further from his thoughts than a wish to brag of the advantage he had obtained over an innocent girl, especially when that girl was about to become his wife.

"The scandal was true!" repeated Flore, her eyes fixed on his face.

"No," he answered, drawing a deep breath, feeling that he must clear her from all stain, or else hate himself for ever. "Lady Valerie is pure as that white blossom," looking across at a camellia in a small glass vase. "If ever we met in private, to her it was by chance—though not to me."

"Of course you would say so," with a sarcastic smile; "but you cannot explain away the letters that passed between you."

He frowned, unable to help despising her, and himself as well, for having to make use of her.

"Are you responsible for all the letters that come to you?"

"Yes, if I answer them."

"But she never did."

"Oh, Colonel Darrell, you expect me to believe that!" with a light laugh.

"Certainly, Miss Springgold, I expect you to believe everything I tell you," looking proud and defiant. "Valerie de Montfort has never stepped down from her pedestal, or she would have been mine before this. Do you think I could have kept away from her if she had given me any encouragement?"

"I wonder what makes you so mad about her!" looking up at him, in much the same way as she used to look at Verreker.

"Remember I did not know you till your name was coupled with Rex Verreker's. When you are married to him, I don't intend our friendship to drop."

"I never shall be!" her cheeks turning pale, her head drooping.

"Yes, you will. He will feel desolate and disappointed, and it will be your task to comfort him. He has been caught by a certain glamour which hangs about the heiress of Beaudesert, but he will turn to you, as the sunflower to the sun, and, upon my word, I shall envy him!"

He stood up; but she retained her seat, the blood coursing wildly through her veins and every pulse beating. Would Rex ever come back with the love-light in his eyes, the love-words on his lips? Oh! if he did, she would never harbour another evil thought in her breast.

To have him always with her was all she asked, and she would cast aside all falsehoods and deceptions, and try to live up to the same standard as he did himself.

But the Colonel was waiting to say good-bye, and as he held the little feverish hand in his a smile played about his lips. He knew that for the sake of the day-dream she would not fall him now. He saw it in her sparkling eyes and flushed cheeks.

"You have not forgotten I—I am to send you a note which will absolve you from all blame when the fuss comes. You drive in your own carriage to Beaudeert, another meets you at the corner of Fir-tree Lane, then you drive back alone, and your responsibility ceases. Are you sure you won't forget?" his dark eyes fixed upon hers as if he would read her very soul.

"No, I won't forget."

The flush had died out of her cheeks, and her lips were pale. He had drawn her on till she thought it was too late to draw back, but even now she felt she was paying a heavy price for a possible benefit.

"Then there is nothing more to be said," releasing her hand, and taking up his hat. "You don't know what a comfort it is to me to have to deal with a woman of superior intelligence, who is above the weakness of making her conscience into a scarecrow. Good-bye, most charming of confederates!" and, with a low bow, he went out of the room.

She stood upon the hearthrug, her hands clasped tight against her temples—a light, graceful figure, her fair complexion and yellow hair giving her the appearance of something too pure and innocent to dream of working any evil.

And yet to what had she pledged herself! Her breath almost stopped as she thought of it, and the fictions with which Colonel Darrell saved her conscience seemed to melt into thin air as soon as he was gone.

Valerie loved him! It was absurd. Had she not seen absolute adoration in her eyes when she looked at Rex? But she had stolen him from her. He was her rightful property—even the Marquis, dunderheaded, floundering old Brum—knew this. He had seen him always ready to give her the lead when they rode to hounds, always her partner for as many dances as she would allow him—always riding over to Beaudeert for a chat when the weather was so vile that it kept everyone else away.

Valerie had injured her, and therefore it was only right and just that she should be punished. Besides, there were many women in the world who would have been only too glad to be punished by marrying the fascinating Colonel Darrell. Even the Duchess of Agincourt, who was so very particular, had thought him good enough to flirt with at the hunt-ball, and some girl in London was said to be dying of love for him.

She tried to reason herself out of the secret terror that possessed her; but say what she would she knew, in her heart of hearts, that there was something in Louis Darrell which would make her shrink in horror from the idea of marrying him. He might be fascinating as an acquaintance to be met every now and then in a ball-room, but as a husband!—the mere thought turned her cold, and this was the fate she was preparing for Valerie de Montfort!

"Oh! Rex, Rex, Rex!" she cried, passionately, as she threw herself face downwards on the sofa; "I am ruining my soul for your sake, and it is you who are bringing me to perdition!"

"I have settled Miss Springgold—drawn her on by the only bait which tempts her," said Colonel Darrell to himself, as he rode through the gathering darkness on his homeward way, though not to Ivora Kcep. "Rex Verreker won't have a word to say to her, but her vanity is so immense that it would make her believe anything. And now for Sleeman—the rascal has been sulky of late, but the world would come to an end before he turned against me."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A STRATAGEM.

"ONLY this day week, and I shall have another name, and begin another life. How wonderful it seems!" And Lady Valerie de Montfort leant

her lovely face against the window-pane, watching three or four horses being led up and down the gravel sweep, and thinking dreamily of the future which lay before her.

Marie de Ravigny came into the room, holding up her habit and trying to button her glove at the same time.

"Milor will be dreadfully disappointed at your not coming. I don't believe he would have had the meet at Belton if he had known you wouldn't be there."

"He will be quite content with you," turning round with a smile. "Besides, I know he will understand; it wouldn't be nice to be pointed out as the girl who is going to be married next week."

"I don't know that there is anything improper in being married; but if you feel shy, I wish you would let me stay with you."

"Not for the world. Lord Daintree would break his heart."

"Ready?" said the Earl, putting his head in at the door. "Good-bye, Val, take care of yourself, and don't stir from the house. We shan't be very late if we find a fox in Belton covers and have good luck."

She ran after him to give him a kiss, and then went back to the window to see them both mount. The Earl looked the model of an English gentleman, with his firm seat, broad shoulders, and resolute features; and the Countess was very bewitching in her own style as she kissed her hand to her friend.

The two rode away on their thoroughbreds, followed by a groom, another having been sent on in front with a second horse for the Earl, in case he might want it. And Valerie turned away resolved to devote this solitary morning to clearing off some of her correspondence.

First she would write to dear old Becky, whom she had neglected shockingly of late, and condole with her on the illness of her sister. Happiness had made her terribly forgetful of her friends, and the present which she had bought as a parting gift for her governess and faithful friend was lying upstake on a shelf of her wardrobe. It was a sealskin bag and muff in one, very richly mounted in silver, and Lady Valerie hoped that it would not only help to warm the old maid's fingers, but also save her from losing her purse, as she often did. If she forgot the muff, she must remember the bag; if she forgot the bag, chilly fingers would remind her of the muff.

It was quite a long letter by the time she had finished it, and it ended up with an entreaty that Miss Beck should bear herself away from her sister, if only for a day, to come for the wedding. If the sister were too ill to be left alone, Lady Valerie would most gladly pay a nurse, because she felt as if she could not be properly married without her old friend to see that nothing was forgotten. Lord Daintree was to be the best man, and as he was in love with the Countess de Ravigny, he would probably present her with the wedding-ring in a fit of absence of mind if Becky weren't there to keep a sharp look-out.

There was a smile on her lips when she closed the letter, for she guessed that the poor old maid would be delighted at her affectionate expressions, knowing very well that her former pupil never said more than she felt.

She was just going to begin a note to another old friend when there was a tap at the door, and to her surprise Miss Springgold walked in, not in her habit, as usual, when the hounds were out, but in ordinary walking attire.

"How d'ye do?" said Lady Valerie, putting down her pen, and rising from her seat with an inward sense of annoyance which she was careful to hide. "How is it that you are not hunting to-day?"

"I had a headache, and meant to stay at home," speaking hurriedly, with a certain catch in her breath, as if the words did not come quite readily; and then I changed my mind, and thought I would drive to Winterton—"

"And then you changed your mind again and—"

"No, no; nothing of the sort!" her manner altering suddenly. "Something has happened, but don't be frightened!"

"My father!" gasped Valerie, taking hold of the back of a chair as if to support herself.

Miss Springgold looked down at the carpet, as if the agony in the girl's terrified eyes were almost too much for her.

"He has had a fall and I've come to fetch you. Be brave, or I can't take you."

"I'll be brave," in a harsh voice, quite unlike her own; "only tell me is he very bad?" Her hand was already on the handle of the door.

"There is hope; but I was sent to fetch you."

"I'm ready," trembling so that she could scarcely stand.

"Put on your hat and something warm, or I shall have your death to answer for."

Valerie disappeared, and Flore turned to the fire. Her own face was white with suppressed agitation, but her lips were set resolutely. Having begun she meant to carry it through to the end. When Valerie came back her maid, Susan, was with her, and offered to go, but Flore hastily refused.

"Come, there's no time to lose," she said, hurriedly, and ran on in front down the corridor to avoid being questioned.

"Drive as fast as you can," to the coachman, as soon as they reached the brougham, who had evidently been given his orders beforehand.

Beaumont was out, the butler was a new man, who did not like to offer a suggestion, the footman seem paralysed by the news of the calamity. Susan was the only one who had her wits about her.

She thrust her young mistress's belongings through the window, and asked if the doctor shouldn't be sent for.

"Yes," said Valerie, hoarsely, "send him after us!"

"But where?—where?"

The window was pulled up hastily by Miss Springgold, and the Colonel's bay mare dashed down the drive as if life and death really depended on his speed.

"I wonder—I wonder—" said Susan, vaguely, looking after the retreating carriage, with a strange mingling in her heart.

The grooms are all out; but one of the helpers can go after the doctor. Did Miss Springgold say where the accident happened? asked the butler.

"She said nothing, and my poor dear lady was so upset she hadn't time to tell me anything at all. But I suppose you asked the coachman?" turning to him eagerly.

"Couldn't get anything out of him. He said it was a terrible fall, from what he could gather, and his mistress seemed in such a way about it that he thought it was a case of 'kingdom come'; but as to the circumstances, he seemed as ignorant as I am myself."

"Oh! dear, dear!" and Susan began to cry.

"Now don't give way; we've got to keep our heads clear, or we shall catch it. If it's anything serious they'll be wanting a bedroom on the ground floor. We must have a fire in the blue room, and see that hot water, brandy, and everything they are likely to ask for is ready to hand," said the butler, thoughtfully.

"Oh! if I could only ride, I'd ride off Belton way, and see if I could catch sight of anyone who's been out with the hounds."

"Not a bad idea. Of course, anyone out hunting would be bound to know. I'll go to the stables at once," and he turned away.

Meanwhile, Colonel Springgold's carriage was going at a swinging pace as soon as it reached the level high-road; hedges, leafless trees, white gate-posts, seemed to fly past, but still the pace was not fast enough to satisfy Valerie's feverish impatience.

She sat bolt upright, her lips tightly pressed together like her hands, her eyes fixed on the world outside the window.

She did not ask a single question; her mind was totally engrossed by the fact that her father was ill, perhaps dying, and she might not even be in time to receive his last kiss.

Details seemed of no importance—no matter how the fall had happened, the result was the only thing of consequence.

If he died, she would not care to know if it were from too reckless riding, or from a fault on

the part of his horse—the beautiful roan which he always said carried him better than any other. If he got well, she would never let him hunt again—oh, never—or, if he did, she would always go with him—always!—when she was going to be married in seven days!

Florence sat by her side in perfect silence. She had played her part, and found it detestably hard, but she would not add to it by any hypocrisies.

Colonel Darrell was responsible for everything, and if there were any wickedness in the matter, the guilt was his, not hers.

She had a note in her pocket which was to absolve her from all blame when the trick was found out; she was to appear as the tool, and not the accomplice.

The carriage suddenly came to a standstill at the corner of a lane.

Valerie looked at her with a question in her eyes, but her tongue seemed dumb.

Florence bent forward and kissed her.

"I must say good-bye. The mare can go no further, but they have sent a carriage for you. You know I told you they had taken him to an inn; and you won't mind going alone. Of course the others will be there."

All the while she was picking her way through the mud to the spot where another brougham was standing, with a pair of black horses, close to a clump of firs.

There was a man on the box besides the driver, but he did not get down, or even turn round, when Lady Valerie sprang in. The coachman, however, evidently knew that speed was necessary, for no sooner had Miss Springgold shut the door upon her friend than the carriage started off as if the horses had suddenly taken fright, and Lady Valerie sat with white cheeks and eyes wide open with terror, thankful at least for the speed which was taking her—to Colonel Darrell's arms!

CHAPTER XLIX.

IN HIS POWER!

THE carriage sped on through the cold, grey day, and Lady Valerie, in her wild anxiety, never noticed whither it was taken her. They passed through a village now and then, where the labourers stood still in open-mouthed astonishment at the pace at which the black horses were going, but they did not halt till they drew up at the iron gates belonging to the private grounds of a white house.

Then one of the men got down and opened the gates, and drove on, past clumps of evergreens whose leaves were shining with the dampness of the atmosphere, to a front door, which seemed to loom suddenly out of the growing mist.

Evidently they were expected, because the door was thrown open before anyone had time to ring, and a solemn-looking butler came down the steps to assist Lady Valerie to alight. Even in her preoccupied state of mind she noticed that this did not look like an inn, but she only supposed that Miss Springgold had been mistaken.

"Allow me," said the servant, as she fumbled nervously with the handle of the carriage-door.

"Where is my father?" she asked, hoarsely, her heart beating so fast that she could scarcely speak.

"In the drawing-room, miss. Will you step into the library for a minute?" said he, then threw open a door on the right of the hall.

She had kept up so bravely, but now the moment was near when she was to see him, and she did not know how terribly changed he might be. A sickening fear came over her, and she dropped down on a sofa because she had not the strength to stand.

Presently the door opened; her heart seemed to beat with two loud hammers in her ears. Fancy, if the face she loved were horribly disfigured; and in a moment she pictured it grey and ghastly, with blood pouring from a gash on the forehead! There was a step on the carpet, and she looked up to see Colonel Darrell coming towards her in hunting-dress, black coat, and

white cords, with splashes of mud on his high-boots. His dress, assumed for that special purpose, told her where he had been. Therefore she was not surprised—perhaps he had been nearest the Earl when he fell, and so had picked him up and brought him to a stranger's house.

He took her hands in his and looked down into her face, his own white with excessive but suppressed excitement, and a wave of compassion swept over his heart. It went against him to think it was through him that she had been so terribly frightened, but surely the end justified the means.

"Take me to him," she breathed faintly, and he saw how she trembled.

"Not till you are more composed. Wait a moment."

"No, I must see him at once!" her eyes still with that startled look of terror, not for herself, but for her dying father.

"He is not so bad as we feared," he said, soothingly, afraid that his confederate had gone too far, and that he would gain no power over her as long as she was entirely engrossed by the one idea. Somehow, in spite of his reckless determination to win her against her own will, he was not cruel by nature, and it touched him to see how she had forgotten all fear for herself in her anxiety for her father. "Indeed, his injuries are much slighter than we thought," watching her intently as he spoke.

She drew a deep breath, and the tears rushed into her eyes.

"Thank Heaven!"

He smiled tenderly, and led her back to the sofa.

"Sit down. When your nerves are more composed I will take you to him."

He knew that every moment was of value to him, and he had to exert his whole powers of self-restraint to hide the wild impatience which was consuming him, but at the same time he knew as well that over-haste would ruin all.

Keeping himself in check, as he had often curbed the spirit of his own favourite horse Kismet, he talked to her gravely, sitting at a little distance from her, detailing the circumstances of the accident, till by-and-by the fit of trembling was over, and she looked up at him and said with truth,—

"I am quite calm now."

"I am a bit of a doctor. Would you allow me to feel your pulse?"

She held out her hand with ready obedience, and he put his fingers on her soft white wrist.

"Galloping as if to win a race," he said, with a smile; "but steadier than it was. I will go and see what the doctor says."

He went out of the room quickly, and going into the drawing-room rang a bell.

"Why is Mr. Porter not here?" he asked, as soon as the butler appeared in answer.

"He sent to say that he could not be here for three hours, sir, as he had to go to a funeral at a distance."

"Three hours!" his face blank with utter dismay as he muttered an awful oath.

Then he recalled his self-control with an effort, and after a few minutes of anxious thought told the butler to bring him a decanter of port and two wine-glasses.

As soon as the order was obeyed, and the servant gone, Colonel Darrell took a small packet out of his pocket, poured some wine into one of the glasses, and shook some white powder into it, carefully measuring the quantity with his eye.

Then he stirred it with his penknife till the powder was entirely absorbed in the wine, held it up to the light to be quite sure that there was nothing to make it look different to an ordinary glass of port, and being satisfied with the result took it into the library.

Lady Valerie looked up at him with eager eyes.

"Did you think I was never coming!" with a smile.

It pleased him to see anything but aversion in her eyes, although he knew that the eagerness was not for him.

"The Earl is marvellously better; but the doctor is afraid of any agitation, and he insists

upon your drinking this before he will allow you to see him."

"But I may go directly I have!"

"Do you think that any one could wish to keep you away?"

"No, why should they?"

He put the glass into her hand, and she could not guess how the mere contact with her slender fingers made the blood boil in his veins.

She drank it off in feverish haste, thinking the sooner it was swallowed the sooner she would get to her father, and then she sprang to her feet.

"Now," she said, "I am ready."

"Yes," he said, slowly, as he watched her, "the Earl will be delighted to see you."

She took a few steps forward and then stopped, stretching out her hands as if to feel for something to catch hold of. What was this dizziness which made her totter like a baby?

The floor seemed as if it were waving up and down like the waves of the sea, and the writing-table in the middle of the room seemed to rise up to meet her. A weight came over her eyes, and pressed the lids close down till the long lashes rested on her cheeks, and with a sigh of utter helplessness she fell into the arms which were but too willing to receive her.

A gleam of exquisite tenderness lit up Colonel Darrell's usually stern face as he lifted her gently on to the sofa, and knelt down beside her. Was there ever such loveliness before! And all this would be his own when four hours were over! If only his secret was kept till all was finished.

It was almost enough to turn his brain, the sudden sense of possession after a year-and-a-half of impotent longing.

It had all been planned with the most prudent foresight, which had foreseen everything, and provided against accident. He had fixed on the day of the meet at Belton; one on which Marie de Ravigny was sure to go out hunting, and Lady Valerie was to stay at home.

There was a delicacy and reserve in her nature which would make her not anxious to exhibit herself in public so shortly before her wedding; but the pretty Austrian would not like to disappoint the Marquis and endanger the coronet which seemed to be waiting for her.

Rex Verreker had gone up to town, as he thought Darrell was safe in London; the Earl was riding somewhere across country with Daintree and most of the gentlemen of the neighbourhood. There would be nothing suspicious in the arrival of Miss Springgold, and if the hunt was anything of a run, the Earl would not appear in person to give the life to her tale till late in the afternoon. Probably some time would be lost in making up their minds what to do; then somebody would ride over to Scarsdale to find out the meaning of the mystery, whilst the others waited till the messenger came back.

Firtree-lane was the only direction that Florence could give, for he had carefully concealed Valerie's final destination, and when they reached the lane they would be hopelessly puzzled.

Hours must elapse before they could get on the right track, and by that time he would be quite ready to receive the Earl and as many of them as liked to come.

A smile of confident triumph was on his face as he rose up from his knees to stir the fire. In answer to his vigorous poke a brilliant blaze lighted up the room, and brought its old-fashioned furniture into full relief.

It would have been a comfortable room but for the desolate look of the empty bookcases and the absence of all ornaments except one vase containing red and white camellias on the writing-table.

The mantelpiece was quite bare, and the whole effect was that of a furnished house hurriedly let to a new occupant who had not as yet had time to settle down in it, which was the case.

The former owner had left England suddenly to take an appointment in India, and his solicitors had been glad to let the house to Colonel Darrell for a month whilst on the look-out for another tenant.

Alone with Valerie de Montfort!—he could scarcely believe it. She would be his in spite of Rex Verreker—his to love, to cherish, to care; her beauty would be his to deck as he chose with

the stores of jewels he had collected during his travels in the East; and scorn him as she might at first in passionate resentment, she would come back to him in tender submission, with her dark eyes full of love, kisses trembling on her lips, for there was not a woman who could resist him if he chose to make his power felt.

Again and again he went up to the sofa where she lay, and thought that he had never seen her look so deliciously lovely before. There were dark circles round her eyes, and her long lashes looked almost black.

He stooped his head with the passionate longing to touch those lips with his, but the instincts of a gentleman made him draw back, swayed by a girl's sweet innocence.

There would be time enough in the future, when she would be content to offer what he was honourable enough not to steal without her knowledge. He prided himself upon this proof of his self-restraint, but he seemed to forget that to steal a kiss was a small injury compared to stealing herself, as he was doing now.

Time crawled on, the room grew dark, he went to the windows and closed the shutters, then rang the bell for candles, which he took from the butler's hand, and placed on the mantelpiece.

"Is everything ready?"

"Yes, sir. The lady and gentleman are in the drawing-room waiting, and I have lighted the chandeliers, as well as the candelabras against the wall."

"Then put them out at once. The less light the better. Two candles on the centre table will be sufficient. No sign of Mr. Porter yet?"

"No, sir; I will let you know the moment he arrives."

"Keep the front door bolted, and tell Slesman to come to me."

"He's not here, sir. I thought you had sent him out."

Colonel Darrell frowned,—

"Send him to me directly he comes in."

Turning away he muttered to himself,—

"What the deuce does the fellow mean by taking himself off just when I want him most? I shall get rid of him as soon as I can, for Valerie won't be able to bear the sight of him."

CHAPTER L.

UNDER THE SPELL.

It would be impossible to say how often Colonel Darrell looked at his watch during the course of that afternoon; but the longest day must have an end, and before the end there came the sound of wheels outside, and a knock at the front door.

Colonel Darrell hurried from the room to intercept the butler before he could open it.

"Look out of the window first, you block-head," he said, angrily, as the servant ran into an adjoining room to reconnoitre.

"It's the parson, sir."

"All right, let him in; take him into the drawing-room, and tell him I will come at once."

"Now for it," he said to himself as he drew a deep breath, and stood over the sofa where Valerie was still lying in a state of happy unconsciousness. There was not an instant to lose; the game was in his hands to lose or win! Now that the supreme moment had come his confidence almost failed him. What if he had overrated his powers, and the spell would not work!

But he would not allow himself time to think. He roused her as fast as he could with the strongest smelling salts, and held a cup of black coffee, which he had kept down by the fire for half the afternoon, to her lips as soon as they were able to part.

She drank it, and then her feet dropped down to the ground; she rubbed her eyes, and sat up.

Before she had time to ask a question or to make a remark, he said,—

"Your father is waiting for you."

"And you have let me sleep here! Why, how late it is!" looking round with wondering eyes at the closed shutters and lighted candles. "It

was daylight when I came. What will papa think of me!"

"I told him that you had fainted."

"I must go to him at once," and she attempted to rise.

He laid his hand on her shoulder.

"You must wait an instant."

"Excuse me, I have waited too long already!" drawing herself away from his touch, as if she now for the first time remembered her aversion to him.

He saw it, and folded his arms across his heaving chest, looking down at her with a dangerous tenderness in his eyes.

But he had himself well in hand, and his manner was cold and deferential.

"Listen! Lady Valerie!" he said, gravely, "Your father is suffering from a blow on the head, and the slightest excitement is sure to bring on concussion of the brain! Your nerves are all upset! Your heart is beating at fever-rate! You are in no state to go into a patient's room!"

"But I must!" restrained from springing to her feet because he was standing straight in front of her.

"Yield yourself to me, and you shall. Place yourself in my hands, and your nerves shall be calmed in five minutes!"

A coal jumped out of the grate, and the tension of his own nerves was so great that he started as if he had been shot.

It was hard to keep his head clear and appear cool and collected—ready to seize upon every chance that offered—when his ears were strained to catch every sound outside.

"You know I have a power," he added, significantly; and he saw the shudder that seized her.

"I am afraid!—but I will be calm—indeed I will!" clasping her hands tightly.

"You would break down, and do a world of mischief at the first sight of him! What are you afraid of! Your friends are within call. Your father's room is just the other side of the passage. They have consented that I should try my method, as chlorodyne and sal volatile have done no good; and what motive could I have but your own good?"

His voice was low and steady, though his heart was bursting with impatience, because he knew that this delay might be fatal.

"Try," she said, seeing that there was no other way of gaining her own end.

And, after all, there was nothing to fear, when the others were in the next room, ready to come at the first call.

If they had sent him they would only wait a little while before they came to see after her, as they all mistrusted him as much as she did.

A gleam shot from his eyes; but he still controlled himself by the force of his iron will.

"Look at me!"

She raised her eyes to his, and kept them there fixed on his glowing pupils by a power which she could not resist.

"I am your master's spirit," he said, in a low, impressive voice. "I know every secret of your heart, and if I choose I can compel you to confess them by word of mouth. Your will is mine, and subject to mine!"

He lifted his hands as he spoke with something shining brightly between them, whilst he concentrated all the strength of his will on the girl before him.

"I can make you hope what I hope, wish what I wish, live as long as I may live, and die when I die! Now sleep!" lowering his hands.

And as he lowered them her eyelids fell. He drew a deep breath; his power had not failed him; his will, working first on her imagination, controlled her nerves, and made her senses subjugate.

"Stand!"

She rose obediently, but like a person in a dream.

"Now, answer when I speak to you. Say 'I will!'"

He bent his head, and fixed his eyes upon her wavering form and drooping neck.

"I will!"

It was only a whisper, but he raised his head,

and almost gave a shout of triumph. The last test had been tried, and it had succeeded. The moisture stood on his forehead, for the happiness of his life depended on it.

A thrill of exquisite delight ran through his pulses as he felt that he could do with her as he liked; that she was entirely in his hands for better or for worse, even before those fatal words were said.

He drew her passive hand through his arm, and led her out of the library, down the hall, and into the drawing-room, and as he went he looked right and left for the slouching form of Zebedee Slesman, but he was nowhere to be seen.

A slight frown puckered his forehead, but, after all, it did not matter much, only in case of an emergency he liked to have his ready tool at hand.

The drawing-room was a large room furnished with old-fashioned yellow damask and ebony chairs and cabinets. It was dimly lighted by two candles in tall silver candlesticks, shaped like Corinthian pillars, and placed on a table covered with a crimson cloth. On the right side of the table stood a clergyman in a white surplice, with a prayer-book in his hand, and just behind him was a smaller table, with papers, pen, and a travelling inkstand. On the left side were two people, whom Colonel Darrell vaguely introduced with a wave of his hand, as the aunt and uncle of the bride.

The Rev. James Porter, temporary substitute for the absent rector, looked nervously from one to the other. There was something so strange and inexplicable in the component parts of this wedding-party—the lovely girl standing before him with closed eyes, as if she were more than half asleep—the aristocratic bridegroom, with the pale, determined face and disordered dress; the silent lady and gentleman acting the part of witnesses, but looking as if their usual sphere was the housekeeper's room or the pantry.

"I hope there is nothing irregular!" he began, in a hesitating voice.

"Nothing at all. Here is the special license," drawing it out of his pocket, "and everything has been done according to law. Pray, proceed!" his tone bespeaking the exasperated impatience from which he was suffering.

"The lady is of age!" with a questioning look at the drooping face which looked so infinitely young and innocent.

"Ask her own aunt."

"Yes, sir," came from under the folds of an unusually thick veil.

Then Colonel Darrell stepped forward, and said, in a low voice,—

"This lady is blind, and more than half deaf. The ceremony is therefore very trying to her, and, with your permission, we will leave out all that is not absolutely necessary."

Added to his fear of interruption was the other fear that his influence might be waning, and that she would either be roused completely before the "I will" was said, or else, at least, not answer when the question was asked. Half mad at any delay, he bit his lip till the blood came, whilst maintaining a calm demeanour.

"Blind and deaf! poor young thing!" thought Mr. Porter, compassionately. "I hope this far-seeing man will know how to take proper care of her!"

Then he bowed his assent, and opened his book once again. He had still an instinctive misgiving that all was not right, but he had no excuse for refusing to perform the service. A special license exempts either bride or bridegroom from the necessity of staying in the parish for a certain period before the marriage, so there were no questions to be asked on that score, and there was something about Colonel Darrell's manner which showed that he would not submit patiently to idle interrogatories.

The lady and gentleman took up their position behind the bridal pair, the clergyman cleared his throat, the marriage service began.

There was not a sound in the room but Mr. Porter's voice. Colonel Darrell stood rigid as a statue, his hands clenched tight, his eyes fixed on Lady Valerie in breathless suspense.

The first exhortation was left out to save time; at the end of the second a slight quiver passed

over the bride's passive face, but her eyes remained closed.

Colonel Darrell, watching her closely, feared that she would be roused before the end. He said his "I will" hastily, almost tripping up the solemn words as they fell from Mr. Porter's lips, and then bending down, whispered in her ear,—

"Say, 'I will!'"

The clergyman was waiting. There was a breathless pause. The two strangers leant forward.

"Say, 'I will!'" repeated Darrell, hoarse with emotion.

The pale lips moved—a gleam of triumph shot from his eyes; only a few minutes more she would be his wife, and "Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder." His heart beat so loud that he could scarcely hear any other sound.

"Say, 'I will!'"

"I—I—!"—(the pale face grew paler still; the eyelids twitched)—"I—w—"

One minute more, and the vow would have been made; but at that supreme moment there was a rush of footsteps along the passage, and the door was burst violently open.

Rex Verreker looked wildly from one to the other, as if scarcely crediting the scene before him; then sprang forward, and laid his hand on the bride's shoulder.

"I forbid this marriage!" he said, in a voice of thunder.

"By what right?" stammered Mr. Porter, letting his book fall down on the ground.

"The right of an affianced husband!"

"Stop at your peril!" said Colonel Darrell, sternly, his face white as death. "This lady is half married to me—by her own free will and consent!"

Lord Marshall had come in unperceived, and Zebec Sleeman was crouching outside the door.

"Valerie, speak!"

A shudder passed through her frame; then to the clergyman's intense amazement, she opened her eyes wide, and stretching out her hands to her lover said, entreatingly,—

"Take me to my father!"

Colonel Darrell covered his face with his hands. All was over. Verreker's voice had broken the mesmerism spell; and, as if conscious that their services were no longer required, his two witnesses crept out of the room.

CHAPTER LI.

BETRAYED AND BETRAYING.

"You have come too late," said Colonel Darrell, recovering himself with an effort, "and I defy you to prove any legal right to interfere! You are neither parent nor guardian; and this gentleman," with a glance at Mr. Porter, "is bound by my license to continue the service!"

"Then he will continue it without a bride!" said Rex, scornfully, as Valerie c'ug to his arm. "You must be mad to think I would give her up!"

"You cannot take Lady Valerie Darrell as your wife," with a cold sneer; "and the Earl would prefer me as a son-in-law to the loss of his daughter's reputation!"

Rex turned white with a terrible fear, and looked at the clergyman with questioning eyes. "The marriage service was only just begun," said Mr. Porter, firmly. "There was no change of name as yet; and if you assure me that there has been fraud I can refuse to proceed."

"Your own eyes can tell you that there was no compulsion!" said Colonel Darrell, hotly. "You saw her come into the room, and I defy you to say it was not of her own free will!"

"She seemed to me to have little consciousness of what was going on, but that I thought was natural, considering her infirmities."

"I don't know what you mean by my infirmities!" said Valerie, her voice trembling with agitation. "And I don't know what you are doing here; but all I want is to be taken to my

father. They say he is ill, and they won't let me see him!"

"There has been some trick!" exclaimed Mr. Porter, shutting up his book in some excitement; "and till all is explained I refuse to proceed!"

"Are you aware that I can report you to the bishop? My license is correct, and that is all that concerns you. Lady Valerie, listen!" standing straight in front of her. "You cannot go back to the world half-married—your only chance is to throw in your lot with mine, and on my honour, I will be a good husband to you."

For a moment all the sternness went out of his face, and his voice was soft as a woman's.

The others waited in silence for her answer.

"Half-married! I don't understand—there is some mistake," still holding tight to Verreker's arm, though she raised her troubled eyes to Darrell's for an instant.

"Never mind, it is all a fraud—come away," said Rex, impatiently, anxious to put several miles between her and the odious man who had carried her off.

"But I want to understand."

"Your father is well—his illness was only a subterfuge to bring you here."

"Hear him!" cried Verreker, his eyes blazing.

"My father well!" a joyous light shining in hers.

"Yes, it was a fraud. I confess it, but it answered, and you came. Since two o'clock you have been in my house—it is now just seven," a peculiar smile played round his lips; "don't you think after that it would be as well to go on with the marriage service!"

Verreker started forward with clenched fist, but Lord Marshall held him back.

"Wait, and don't spoil her innocence!"

"Go on! Thank Heaven it was never begun. You know that in the past I always hated you; and now that you have deceived me by the cruellest of lies, I pray Heaven that I may never see your face again! Take me away, Rex," her voice faltering; "to be in his house nearly stifles me."

"I will," and he began to lead her to the door.

"Stop," cried Colonel Darrell, his chest heaving, his eyes flashing. "If you go from me now your character is lost for ever!"

"After that," said Lord Marshall, stepping forward, "I will spare you no longer. Unless you take immediate steps for your own safety you will be arrested for the murder of Valentina Marini."

Colonel Darrell recoiled, his face ghastly.

"So you have betrayed your friend," he said, slowly.

"You are no longer my friend," drawing himself up with unaccustomed dignity. "You have placed yourself beyond the pale of gentleman by your dastardly conduct to that girl."

"I have never harmed her—I have treated her with scrupulous reverence, on my word of honour!"

"I knew it!" with contemptuous abruptness. "Now, Verreker, the sooner we depart the better."

"I—I can't let him go like this," muttered Rex between his teeth.

"Perhaps you would like Lady Valerie to look on whilst you thrashed him?" in a sarcastic undertone. "Place her in the dog-cart, and let us be gone. The sooner she is out of this the better."

"You are right," and without another look at his enemy he led her from the room.

Colonel Darrell followed her with his eyes, his face twitching convulsively. After all he had lost her, and the long blank future lay stretched out before him to be spent without her. He stood as if rooted to the ground, like one of the elms outside, and never noticed how Lord Marshall, after one glance in his direction, followed his friends, nor how the clergyman divested himself of his clerical attire, and after packing it up in his bag, hurried from the room, as if glad to breathe a purer atmosphere.

Colonel Darrell found himself alone—everyone had deserted him. The housekeeper and butler

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THE bicycle foot is an ailment developed by women riders, and is caused by wearing the thin-soled, French-heeled boots which are fashionable for wheeling this season, and also from carelessness or incorrect dismounting.

ONE of the greatest wonders of Java, "the fire island," a large lake of boiling mud, is situated almost in the plains of Grobogan, some distance to the north-east of Solo. It is nearly two miles in circumference, and in the centre immense columns of soft, hot mud may be seen continually rising and falling, like black timbers thrust forth and then suddenly withdrawn by a giant's hand. Besides the phenomena of the columns, there are two gigantic bubbles near the western edge, which fill up like huge balloons and explode in an average three times per minute.

FROM ancient times the horse has been an object of special veneration by almost all peoples. It was so among the Greeks, and Tacitus says the Romans in early times kept white horses in the sacred groves at the expense of the State. It was thought that the neighing of the horse was a sign of victory in battle, and the warrior whose steed neighed on the eve of a conflict felt assured of success. On the other hand, if the horse failed to neigh it was looked on as an evil omen. In some parts of Germany part of a horse's head hung above the doors of stables and stalls was supposed to bring good fortune, and even among ourselves at the present time there is a very prevalent feeling that the horseshoe brings good luck. In fact, the horseshoe, more than any other object, is the emblem of a happy turn in affairs. In some parts of Europe it is believed that a horse's hoof under a child's pillow prevents convulsions, and a horse's teeth are supposed to keep away the toothache. If a horse shies at a house, that house is thought to be threatened with misfortune.

whom he had bribed to act the part of uncle and aunt to Lady Valerly, in order to rob it of the appearance of a runaway match, had stolen away at the first alarm, satisfied with the price they had been paid, and anxious to escape all evil consequences. The friend who had stuck by him through good report and bad had been willing to betray him to the scaffold for the sake of a girl who ought to have been nothing to him; and the girl herself, for whom he would have bartered his soul, had left him in scorn and hatred.

There was only one man left who would cling to him in the darkest hour—a fellow whom he had despised and snubbed and abused, but who was always as ready to treat him with servile affection as a beaten spaniel.

He went to the door and called "Zibedel!" in a voice that resounded through the empty corridors, again and yet again, but no answer came. He rang the bell violently, and presently the butler answered it, his countenance disturbed and perplexed.

"Send Sleeman to me at once!"

"I don't think he can be in the house, or he must have heard you, sir. Yet Mary, the housemaid, declares she saw him come in with the others."

"With whom?" his face darkening.

"With the two gentlemen who drove up to the back door about half-an-hour ago. She thought they were special friends of yours, sir, as Sleeman was with them!"

Colonel Darrell said nothing, but as soon as the servant had withdrawn paced up and down the room in violent agitation.

"Betrayed by Sleeman! And I would have staked my life on his fidelity!" he muttered, gloomily.

And in the darkest, farthest-off corner of the house crouched the hunchback, trying to excuse his treachery to his master, trying to console himself with the thought of his revenge.

"It was for Afra's sake, for Afra's. He might have trampled me under foot, and I would never have turned against him, but he took my pet from me, and I've taken him from him! And tomorrow I'll die for him if he'll do him a ha'porth of good."

(To be continued.)

£175,000 WORTH BURIED FOR THIRTY YEARS.

"Is there any other city in the wide world where a cast-iron tunnel, 2½ miles in length, could lie disused, unknown, lost to the memory of all but a few scientists, for over thirty years, excepting London? I doubt it. For this commercial hub of the universe spins onward at such a rapid rate that the dotage of yesterday are already shrouded in mist, and those of a decade back buried so deeply, as if the dust of centuries, not years, lay upon them. So it is that, under the hurrying feet of millions, ever echoing their tramp through the heart of the great city, for long years has lain this almost imperishable testimony to the enterprise, courage, and, alas! misjudgment of certain of its citizens of the sixties. Expert engineers have examined the tunnel, and proclaimed it to be composed of the very best metal—cast-iron such as is not turned out to-day; to quote the words of a prominent expert—and but little affected by earth, moisture, or disease for all its lengthy interment and neglect. Representing as it does the burial of close on £200,000, is it not simply marvellous that no effort until the present has been made to rescue this valuable property from the fungi and huge whistled rats, and turn it to some profitable utility? The answer is that the tunnel had been forgotten, simply lost, and the man who 'found' it found a gold-mine extending from the G.P.O. at St. Martin's-le-Grand to Euston Station. Should the sanguine hopes of the discoverer be realised—and they are based on the reports of the leading authorities—he has struck a payable lead that is not likely to be worked out until flying machines are as ubiquitous and numerous as hansom in London streets. Mr. George Threlfall, a consulting engineer, of 50, Fenchurch

Street, 'found' the tunnel, and the story of his discovery is one of surmounting an almost interminable Alps of obstacles, and a period of five years occupied with continual struggle before success crowned his efforts.—From "London's Lost Tunnel" in the April number of the WINDSOR MAGAZINE.

FACETIE.

JINGSO: "I hear you're a great collector of curios!" Scientific One: "Yes; here comes my wife."

"How is the dentist next to you getting on?" "Well, I should judge that his business was a howling success."

"It doesn't seem possible that we are married," he said. "George dear," replied the young wife, "here is a bill for a bonnet I bought to-day."

LITTLE GIRL (to visitor): "Don't you think I look just like mamma?" Her mother: "Hush, dear; don't be vain."

BIGGS: "That man Dobbs is going round telling lies about you." Biggs: "I don't mind that, but if he begins to tell the truth I'll break his neck."

MAID: "Those people next door are newly married." Mistress: "How do you know?" Maid: "I see the husband helping with the housework."

B'JINKS: "Miss Simperley is quite an oculist, isn't she?" B'JOVE: "I don't understand."

B'JINKS: "She's always making eyes, isn't she?"

BOARDING-HOUSE-KEEPER (to new servant): "I wish you would go up and down stairs two at a time, Matilda; it would save my carpets so much."

SEE: "Oh, Jack! You didn't shoot that poor little bird, did you?" He: "Why, yes, dear; I thought you'd like it to trim a hat." She: "Oh, how good of you! It's perfectly lovely."

HUSBAND: "Smikson's wife is away, and I'm going over there this evening to cheer him up."

WIFE: "Why don't you bring him here?" Husband: "Well—or—I'm not feeling very well and need a little cheering up myself."

DOCTOR: "Troubled with sleeplessness, eh? Eat something before going to bed." Patient: "Why, doctor, you once told me never to eat anything before going to bed!" Doctor (with dignity): "That was in November. Science has made great strides since then."

SMITH (who had forgetfully left his purse on the piano last night): "Have you found anything this morning, Angelina?" Angelina: "Oh, yes, dear! Thanks! I have ordered a new piano-stool, some lace curtains, and such a love of a bonnet."

IGNORAMUS: "You just used the expression 'fin du siècle.' What does that mean?" Cultured Party: "It is French, and means end of the century." Ignoramus: "Then why don't you say end of the century." Cultured Party: "Because that isn't French."

HE (timidly): "Now that we are engaged, I—I presume I may—may—kiss you as much as I please, mayn't I?" She (encouragingly): "Yes, indeed. Make the most of your time, dear. There's no telling how long an engagement will last nowadays, you know."

HUSBAND (of a month): "My love, what cook-book do you use?" Bride: "Sometimes one and sometimes another. Ma and grandma and my six aunts gave me about a dozen of 'em." Husband (meditatively): "I wonder how it would do to not use any for a while."

MRS D'AVRNOO (indignantly): "What! Move out of the city and live in the suburbs! Indeed I won't—so there!" Mr. D'AVRNOO (who wants to economise): "My dear, a pretty woman like you never looks so charming as when sitting in a phœton at a suburban railway station waiting for her husband." She went.

AGENT: "Madam, can't I sell you this valuable book?" Madam: "My eyes are bad; I can't read." "Your children can read it to you." "I'm a spinster, sir; my affections are set on a parrot." "O madam, kind fate has brought us together; this is a work on 'The Care of Parrots.'"

"Yes, pa; at the boarding-school we have to spell everything we eat or drink before the teacher will give it to us." "Yes, my boy; and a very good plan, too; makes you all spell well. I suppose you manage to spell all the words?" "Oh, yes, pa, until it comes to physics, and I always break down at that, and can't for the life of me spell it."

JUDGE: "You say you want a divorce for cruelty." Sad Man: "Yes, y'r honour." Judge: "Now, see here! How could a little bit of a woman like that be cruel to a great big fellow like you?" Sad Man: "I guess, y'r honour, I'll withdraw the suit and wait for a few years." Judge: "What for?" Sad Man: "I'll wait until you've been married a little while y'rself."

MAGISTRATE: "What have you to say for yourself?" Prisoner: "Yer honour, I'm afraid this constable doesn't draw a fine distinction between drunkenness and excitement." Magistrate: "Well, I will allow you to do that, for I shall give you the distinction of a fine. Ten shillings if you were drunk, fourteen days if you were excited." Prisoner decided that he was drunk.

"Your narrative is too highly coloured," remarked the editor, returning the bulky manuscript. "In what way?" Inquired the disappointed author. "Why," replied the editor, "in the very first chapter you make the old man turn purple with rage, the villain turn green with envy, the hero turn white with anger, the heroine turn red with blushes, and the coachman turn blue with cold."

GUEST (struggling with beefsteak on his plate): "Walter, is there a chemist's shop near here?" Walter: "Yes, sir! there is one just across the street." Guest: "Do they sell mustard plasters?" Walter: "Yes, sir; and strong ones too. They touch the spot, and make it tender where you put them." Guest: "That's the sort I want. Please send for a dozen and put them on this beefsteak."

He fell on his knees before her. "I will do anything to prove my love for you," he said. "I will go to the ends of the earth if necessary. No task that you may set me can be too difficult, too hazardous. Only tell me what I can do to convince you—" "You might marry me," she suggested simply. Taking everything into consideration, it finally occurred to him that possibly the idea was a good one.

"George," she said, and her brilliant eyes sought the glowing embers, "I don't believe you love me as you used to." "Why, Fanny," he exclaimed, slipping on his dragon-embroidered slipper, "you are my idol!" "But you don't show it; you don't worship me one tiny bit." "Fanny!"—and his voice rang with all that is empty, "only the wicked worship idols." And with a gasp of uncertainty she again sought the embers.

"JUDGE," said the prisoner on trial for murder, as he rose to his feet, pale as death, trembling in every limb, and holding in his hand a copy of a weekly paper, "do I look like the portrait printed of me in this newspaper?" "There is a slight resemblance, prisoner," replied the astonished judge, "though, of course—" "Then there is no use going any further with this trial, judge," groaned the stricken man, sinking into his chair; "I want to die!"

It is recorded that a certain literary man of high reputation had occasion to remark to a waiter in the restaurant where he sometimes lunched,—"Walter, this beefsteak is very tough." The waiter looked at him with a sorrowful expression, and sighed deeply. "Perhaps you will tell me," said the literary man, "why you sigh in that fashion?" "Ah, sir," said the waiter, "I took you for a man who always said original things, and here you come and say the same thing that all the rest of them do."

SOCIETY.

THE earliest autograph in existence is that of Richard II.

THE custom of wearing earrings has come down from the earliest times. Among the Athenians it was a sign of nobility to have the ears pierced.

THE Tsar has sent his autograph portrait and a beautiful silver breakfast service to Prince Boris of Bulgaria, his god-child, in connection with the fourth anniversary of the little fellow's "conversion."

IT is a rule in Germany that every Prince of Hohenzollern must learn a trade. Therefore, the German Crown Prince and his brothers, when at Kiel, were initiated into the mysteries of ship-building, and spent a long time learning the different kinds of work. The late Emperor Frederick was a bookbinder. Each Prince chooses the handwork that he likes best, and learns the craft thoroughly.

THE painting of the Queen which has just been executed by the great French master Benjamin Constant is to be exhibited in the French Exhibition this year. In this, the latest portrait of Her Majesty, she is represented as sitting in a State chair, wearing a black velvet dress adorned with old lace, the Order of the Garter, and a Crown on her head. Constant and Carolus Duran are frequently represented by portraits in the English and French galleries.

THE German Empress is, like most German ladies, very clever at fancy work. Some of her productions are worthy of an art school diploma. She has made recently a couple of silken quilts for children's coats and a cushion for a bazaar, which were really exquisite both in design and workmanship. Knitting, too, is a favourite pastime of hers, and the name of the socks which have been fabricated by her Majesty is "Legion."

PREPARATIONS are being made in Potsdam for the reception of the Duchess of Albany and her son. The Emperor has placed the Villa Jugenheim at their disposal, and given special commands that all is to be made as luxurious and comfortable as possible. The villa is charmingly situated on the Templin lake, within a short drive of the Palace. It is a pleasant roomy house, with delightful gardens; it belonged for many years to Count Jugenheim, was purchased by the Emperor some time ago and lent to the Russian ambassador Count Schouvaloff when recovering from a tedious illness.

IT is rumoured that a marriage is being arranged between Prince George of Greece, the dashing "High Commissioner" of Crete, and the beautiful Grand Duchess Héloïse Vladimirovna of Russia, cousin of the Tsar. The former is thirty-one in June, and the latter just eighteen, and she was at one time betrothed to Prince Max of Baden, a match broken off most mysteriously last year. The contemplated union would be most suitable, and is much favoured by the Tsar, with whom Prince George, his cousin, is a *personâ gratissima*. Moreover, the Prince's mother is a Russian Grand Duchess too, though hardly any relation of her son's prospective bride. Both the latter are Greek Catholics.

THE fashionable folk of Edward IV.'s court rose with the lark, despatched their dinner at eleven o'clock, and shortly after eight were wrapped in slumber. In the Northumberland House Book for 1512 it is set forth that the family rose at six in the morning, breakfasted at seven, dined at ten, and supped at four in the afternoon. The gates were all shut at nine, and no further ingress or egress permitted. In 1570, at the University of Oxford, it was usual to dine at eleven o'clock and sup at five in the afternoon. The dinner hour, which was once as early as ten o'clock has gradually got later, until now it would be thought very eccentric in the fashionable world to sit down to table earlier than six-thirty, while others extend it to nine or ten.

STATISTICS.

CAKES are made in Mexico from the eggs of two kinds of water-insects.

ABOUT one-half of the population of Greece are agriculturists and shepherds.

ON the 110 square miles of London's area, 1,000 tons of soot settle yearly.

IN the Baltic Sea there are more wrecks than in any other place in the world.

ENGLISHMEN drink five times as much tea as coffee; Americans eight times as much coffee as tea.

GEMS.

CO OPERATION is better than criticism.

HE who judges another writes his own sentence.

ONLY he can truly teach, who is himself teachable.

MEN of great force are apt to have great faults.

CLEVERNESS is a sort of genius for instrumentality. It is the brain of the hand.

MANY waste their powers in getting wealth, and then waste their wealth in getting power.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

APPLE TARTLETS.—Line some patty pans with good puff paste; bake; when cold fill with stewed apples, nicely sweetened, and flavour with lemon; beat up a little cream, sweeten to taste, ornament each tartlet with a ring of it, and place a small lump in the centre; dust over the cream a little powdered sugar coloured with cochineal.

APPLE SHAPE.—One and a-half pounds of apples, rind and juice of one lemon, one-ounce gelatine, five ounces sugar, one breakfastcupful water, a little cochineal. Soak the gelatine in a little of the water and put it aside. Pare and cut up the apples and put them in an enamelled pan with the water, sugar, rind and juice of the lemon, and the gelatine, and let all stew until the apples are quite soft. Then rub the whole through a sieve to make it quite smooth. When this is done take a teaspoonful and colour it red with the cochineal, put it in the bottom of a wetted mould and stand it aside till it is quite firm. Add the remainder, and when firm turn out as the last was done.

COLD CUSTARD PUDDING, VERY PRETTY.—One ounce gelatine, one and a quarter pints milk, quarter-pound sugar, three yolks of eggs, three penny spongecakes, three-quarter teaspoonful vanilla, two ounces cherries, a small bit of angelica, a few drops of cochineal or carmine. Soak the gelatine in a quarter-pint milk (that is, a small teaspoonful). Then put the yolks, sugar and vanilla in a basin and mix well with a spoon. Put on one pint of milk to boil (that is, two small breakfastcupfuls) and then pour it in among the eggs and sugar, stirring all the time. Pour it back to the saucepan, with the soaked gelatine and stir over the fire till the custard thickens. It must not boil. Pour it out equally in two basins to cool. Colour one of the basins pink with the carmine and leave the other yellow. Now get a nice mould and put a few of the cherries and a few bits of the green angelica in the bottom, and a thin slice or two of the sponge cake; pour in half of the yellow portion and let it get firm. Then a slice or two more sponge-cake, and half of the pink portion. When this gets firm add the remainder of the yellow and more spongecake, and then finish with pink on the top. Turn out when cold by dipping the shape in warm water, and it will shake out on a crystal dish. The water must only be warm, not hot.

MISCELLANEOUS.

IN Natal the hailstones are without equal. Lumps of ice as large as walnuts strike with a force which is actually dangerous to life.

SCIENTISTS make the assertion that there are undoubtedly dormant volcanoes in the United States which will some day become active.

SEVERAL of the catacombs at Rome are lighted by electricity, and the system will be extended to all the catacombs.

ONE of the strangest and most distinctive features of New Orleans is the presence of collecting tanks for rainwater in almost every house yard.

AMONG the many mysteries of bird migration is the fact that over-sea journeys are generally conducted in the darkness, and invariably against a head wind.

WITH the single exception of Norway there is no land in Europe whose area is so taken up by forests as Germany, more than a quarter of its surface being devoted to them.

THE lamp mostly used in Africa is a simple contrivance. In a coconut-shell filled with palm-oil a bit of rag is placed to serve as a wick, and this gives all the light that the native requires.

IT was once customary in France, when a guest had remained too long, for the host to serve a cold shoulder of mutton instead of a hot roast. This was the origin of the phrase "to give the cold shoulder."

THERE has been discovered in India a strange plant which possesses astonishing magnetic power. The hand touching it immediately receives a strong magnetic shock, while at a distance of twenty feet a magnetic needle is affected by it.

DA CAPO!

"LADY CUSTOMER: I want to look at some crêpons.

Shopman: Crêpons, madam!

Lady Customer: Yes—woollen crêpons.

Shopman: Something warm and hard-wearing!

Lady Customer: Yes; I want it for a serviceable winter dress.

Shopman: Black or coloured, madam?

Lady Customer: Oh, black; or, no, I think I'll look at some navy; I don't know, though, perhaps I'd better have black. Have you it in the new red automobile shade?

Shopman: Certainly, madam; or would you like black with a fancy stripe?

Lady Customer: Yes, that might do; something to look stylish and drowsy.

Shopman: I quite understand. And do you prefer a broad or a narrow stripe?

Lady Customer: Well, not too broad; and yet I don't want it too narrow; about half way between, I think.

Shopman: Exactly. I should imagine a medium stripe with a narrow one on either side would meet your requirements!

Lady Customer: Yes; that sounds rather pretty. I'll look at that.

Shopman: You would like a good quality, I suppose!

Lady Customer: Well, I don't want anything very expensive; at the same time, I don't want a crêpon that will spot all over the first time I get caught in a shower of rain.

Shopman: Of course not. Probably those that are guaranteed to be already shrunk would suit you.

Lady Customer: That's the very thing. Let me see; it was olive green I decided on, wasn't it? Yes, well let me look at—

Shopman: Then if you'll just step to the lift, madam, you'll be able to obtain what you require on the third floor, turn to the right, and it's the fourth department on the left. Sign! Lady wants dress good, sir. (And then she had to begin all over again).—From the April number of the WINDSOR MAGAZINE.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

ANNA.—Boil it for an hour in a solution of alum.

J. A.—It is criminal for uncle and niece to marry.

IGNORANT.—"Requiescat in pace," meaning, may he rest in peace.

ROTH.—A teaspoonful of powdered lead will give brilliancy to the stove.

L. L.—Burns wrote "Comin' thro' the Rye," meaning the rye-grass, not the river of that name.

GRACE.—Children of any age, from two years old and upwards, are quite old enough to act as bridesmaids.

BARBARA.—You should leave off the practice. Too frequent washing of the head destroys the vitality of the hair.

DETERMINED.—If you are bent on trying it, we can only recommend you to adopt the usual course—that of application through an agent.

BROOK.—Dust the birds thoroughly with powdered sulphur. The latter may be applied with a spice-box or any article having a lid perforated with small holes.

VIOLET.—Black rusty craps is restored by being dipped in scalding hot milk and water, with a bit of glue in it; take it out of this, dip in the hands, pull it dry, and it will look as good as new.

HARRY.—The battle of Hohenlinden was fought between the French and Bavarians on the one side, and the Austrians on the other, on December 3rd, 1800. The Austrians were defeated.

WOMEN.—We think the matter might well be considered to be at an end. An apology has been offered and accepted, and the best thing is to try and forget the unpleasantness as soon as possible.

UNHAPPY EVA.—Better tell him the truth and break the engagement. It is probable you will meet some one you will love after a while. Most women who are wondrously do love at some period of their lives.

STEWART.—The Irish section of the Union Jack is the red diagonal cross; of course the national Irish flag nowadays is the harp on a green ground, and the Scotch national flag the red lion rampant on a yellow ground.

MILDRED.—In counting the fingers the practice is to say the hand carries four fingers and a thumb; the engagement or wedding-ring is carried upon the third finger; others are put on either second or little finger.

MARIE.—White feathers are cleaned with very little trouble. Take a firm piece of wadding and fill with fine clean plaster of Paris, rubbing the feathers briskly from the quill out. Be careful not to disarrange the feather.

R. L.—The capital of the Transvaal Republic is Pretoria. Potchefstroom was originally the capital. But the seat of government is always the capital of a state, and the capital changes as the government may remove its locale.

PARTY POLLE.—The term was originally used in the days when it was the custom that no woman should marry until she had spun herself a set of body, table and bed linen. So all the unmarried women became to be called spinners.

BRENDA.—Mix two tablespoonfuls of liquid ammonia with half a pint of hot water, and apply it to the velvet with a stiff brush, so as to take out all the stains and creases. Then hold the velvet over a hot iron until the steam raises the pile.

AMELIA.—The term "crocodile tears" is applied to false tears, or hypocritical sorrow. It is derived from the tales of early travellers who represented the crocodile as weeping over its prey, or crying to attract persons so that it might devour them.

ADA.—The best way to remove them is to strain over a bowl or cup and to pour boiling water through, and continue doing so till the stain goes, if it is hard to move a little powdered borax may be rubbed in and more boiling water poured on.

KIT.—Mix some bullock's gall, half gill turpentine, half pint strong soap "apple" with as much pipe-clay as will make a stiff paste; put this over the marble, and let it remain for two days, rub off with soft cloth, and repeat until the marble is clean.

OSCEL.—As the parents are opposed to the match, it would be advisable to attempt to remove their scruples before proceeding any further in the affair. The opposition of parents to an intended marriage should always be treated with consideration and respect.

MIKA.—Make a thick mullage by boiling a handful of fax-wood; add a little dissolved soap, then, when the mixture cools, with a piece of white flannel wipe the gloves, previously fitted to the hand; use only enough to take off the dirt without wetting through the glove.

QUEST.—The French Army had been thoroughly defeated, was disorganised and on the point of retreat before Blucher's forces came on the ground; the Prussians, however, were necessary to turn the defeat into an utter rout, and this they accomplished magnificently.

JESSIE.—If the chairs are morocco, they require simply to be washed with a damp sponge, and as they are drying, brushed with a hard brush. This restores the gloss to real morocco. If the chairs are roan, which is the cheaper kind of leather, if the skin of the leather is unbroken, they should be varnished with leather varnish, but it must be done by a skilled person.

EDIE.—The great secret in keeping goldfish is to give them a good large globe and to renew the water at least once a day. It should be drawn off with a syphon so as not to disturb the fish, which are easily injured in lifting them about, either with a net or the hand.

YOUNG HOUSEWIFE.—If your carpet looks dusty and dull after being swept, add two teaspoonfuls of ammonia to half a gallon of cold water, wring a clean cloth out of it, and with this rub the carpet thoroughly all over. Rinse your cloth frequently, and change the water if it gets very dirty.

A. B.—The grades in the army are:—Private, lance-corporal, corporal, sergeant, colour-sergeant, quartermaster-sergeant, sergeant-major (warrant-officer), quartermaster, second lieutenant, lieutenant, captain, major, lieutenant-colonel, colonel, major-general, lieutenant-general, general, field-marshal.

DELIA.—It is not a nice job, but a pair of old gloves will prevent the hands being soiled, and there is so much comfort afterwards in having lamps which give a brilliant light and do not smell, and this can only be accomplished by keeping the wicks evenly trimmed and the burners and reservoirs clean.

RENA.—Grease spots on carpets may be removed by covering with a paste made of fuller's earth and spirits of turpentine. Let the paste remain on till thoroughly dry, and then brush off. If the spots are very bad they may need to be slightly rubbed with the paste—not too hard, or the fuller's earth will be difficult to get out.

H. B.—Never dry your hands after washing them in hot water without first cooling them off under the cold water faucet. There is a theory that this whitens them; it certainly hardens them to exposure. If addicted to chapped hands bathe them at night in lukewarm water, then rub in a mixture of rose-water and glycerine.

HOUSEWIFE.—Lift the carpet; have it thoroughly beaten and hung over a rope on a breezy day in order that it may be relieved of any shade of dampness; lay, if possible, cedar felt underneath it; this is sold in rolls by most stationers; at least put a good layer of brown paper below, and at the edges of the carpet have strips of the paper soaked in turpentine.

WHO WAS THE HEROINE?

ONE woman bravely went afar
To lands made desolate by war;
She cared for wounded, sick and dead,
The naked clothed, the hungry fed;
Another spent the whole of life
Fulfilling duties of a wife
And mother—making home a bright,
Obverse spot of love and sweet delight.
The first one died—whole columns tell
Her virtues and her deeds of gold,
The other, one day, gently slept—
Her children and her husband wept.

F. K.—Wine stains may be removed by straining the stained portion over a basin and rubbing common salt into it, and then pouring boiling water through, repeating until the stain is removed, but we fear the treatment would destroy the delicate tint of the fabric you speak of; we should, therefore, advise you to take it to a professional cleaner.

ELLA.—If you are obliged to help with housework, and your hands are inclined to chaps, try wearing a pair of loose gloves, well greased on the inside with cold cream, for an hour after you have finished all the rougher part of the work. Well wash the hands in hot water before putting on the gloves, and in lukewarm water, with a little good soap, after.

MIRACULOUS MRS.—All that you can do is to make the best of it. Tell him what you have heard, and give him a chance of an explanation. And it will be better for your future peace of mind to accept the one he gives you and disregard all others. What he may have done before marriage in no way alters your present duties as wife under the circumstances.

REX.—First rub thoroughly with sweet oil, leaving enough oil on the article to be cleaned to thoroughly soak into the rust. Leave till next day, and then rub with unslaked lime till all rust is removed. Remember that if rust is allowed to eat very deeply into steel, nothing will remove the marks, so always look over any steel articles that are not in constant use every month and have them cleaned if necessary.

SYN.—When working or reading see that you have sufficient light, and that it falls on your work. It is best that the light should fall from above, behind, or the side, for it tries the eyes to have to face it directly. Never work or read by firelight; artificial light should be bright and steady, for a dim or flickering light is most harmful. Reading while travelling by train or by omnibus should be avoided, for the jolting causes too great a strain on the eyes.

PLO.—Thread a needle flat in the eye, using thread that is strong, but not too coarse. Then pass the head of the needle under the ring. Keep the needle before beginning. The needle having been passed through, pull the thread through a few inches towards the hand. Wrap the long end of the thread around the finger toward the nail. Then take hold of the short end and unwind it. The thread, thus pressing against the ring, will gradually remove it, however tight or swollen the finger.

L. E.—You might try sponging with barline slightly diluted with water, this will remove the shiny appearance if greenness has caused it; if the nap is worn off you can raise a new supply by rubbing the parts over with teased heads, which are largely employed for the purpose by professionals, as well as household economists.

AMBITION.—It is indisputable that the sooner after fourteen a profession is commenced to be studied the more likelihood there is of the attainment of early proficiency. At such an advanced age as that named, unless there is not only a strong predilection but an absolute natural ability, it would be best not to make the attempt. Learning of any kind is of little use without the capacity to turn it to account, and whether you possess this or not only those who are fully qualified can give a reliable opinion.

POLEY.—Provide bottles which must be perfectly clean, sweet and dry; pour the cocoanut milk into the bottles, and as they are filled immediately cork them well up and fasten the corks with pack thread or wire. Then spread a little straw at the bottom of a boiler, in which place bottles with straw between them, until the boiler contains a sufficient quantity. Fill it up with cold water, heat the water, and as soon as it begins to boil draw the fire and let the whole gradually cool. When quite cold take out the bottles and pack them in sawdust in hampers and stow them in the coolest part of the house.

BEULAH.—If it has a smooth, strong surface, you may clean it to look almost like new by cutting up two or three or more loaves of stale white bread into convenient shaped lumps for pads, and carefully breading it all over by rubbing it with the bread pads, beginning at the top and working down; going evenly over the whole, you will soon see how quickly the bread absorbs the snake and soil, and if it is in the proper condition of staleness, but not too hard, the bread will crumble and fall down as it removes the dirt. You must be careful to remove the hard, dry outside of the bread and crust from the pad, as these would cause scratches on the comb portion were off. If necessary go over the walls a second time.

PIERCE.—Make a suds of tepid water with white castile soap, and add powdered borax in the proportion of one level teaspoonful to each two pailfuls of water. Thoroughly shake the dust from the curtains, immerse them in the suds, and without rubbing any soap on them work them up and down and squeeze through the hands for ten minutes. Place them inside a piece of clean, white muslin and wring them through the wringer. Rinse in two waters and wring as directed above. Hang sheets over lines, spread the curtains over them, and let hang in the shade until nearly dry, changing them about that they may dry as even as possible. Then take them down, fold smoothly, and roll up in the sheets and let them lay one or two hours before they are ironed. In ironing, a cloth should always be placed over silk fabrics, and they, as well as all coloured and embroidered muslin curtains, should be ironed on the wrong side, and have a heavy blanket placed over the ironing-board. If the curtains are trimmed with fringe it should be ripped off and washed separately. Shake out well after rinsing, and comb out the fringe when dry.

PRIVILEGE.—Left hand upper corner, upright, means "Good-bye, sweetheart, good-bye," reversed, "I love you," diagonally, "My heart is another's," side, "Have you a lover dangling after you?" right hand upper corner, upright, means nothing; reversed "Write me more," diagonally, "Do you love me?" side, "Gentle sir, my heart is fruitless and free," right hand lower corner, upright, "I wish your friendship," reversed, "May I call and see you?" diagonally, "I might learn to," side, "I am sincere," left hand lower corner, upright, "The coast is clear," reversed, "Some one is in wait for you, so beware," diagonally, "I fear to trust you," side, "You are too bold," in the centre at the top, upright, "Yes," reversed, "My heart has long been yours," diagonally, "Darling, have you money?" side, "You talk too much and say too little," centre, right side, upright, "I'll tell you some other time," reversed, "I cannot trifle; show that you are in earnest," diagonally, "I cannot give you up," side, "I may change my mind," centre, left side upright, "Perhaps," reversed, "I am engaged," diagonally, "I long to see you," side, "I entrust you to be less cruel," centre, at bottom, upright, "No," reversed, "I hate you," diagonally, "Go, flatterer, go; I'll not trust to thy vow," side, "You may write if you wish."

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